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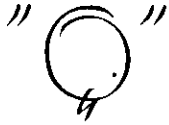

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Vol. 13, No. 62, JANUARY 1949. *Published monthly by The American Mercury, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U. S. and its possessions, and in the countries of the Pan-American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.*

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Entered as second class matter August 28, 1941, at the post office at Concord, N. H., under the act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U.S.A.

Published also in Australian, French, German, and Portuguese editions by affiliated companies. Published in a Talking-Record Edition by the American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Kentucky.

Cover and Typography by George Salter

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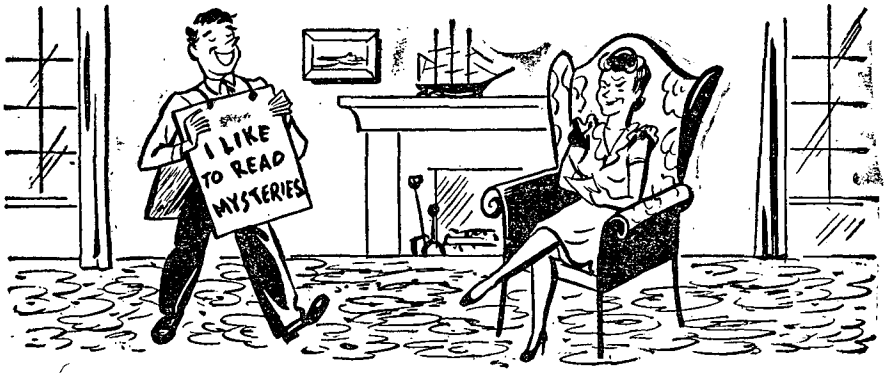

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THE CLUE IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE CLUE

Clayton Rawson conceived, edited, and published the only "fan magazine" in the detective-mystery field — if not the only one, certainly the best one ever attempted and executed. We use the word "executed" in its two most important meanings: for surely Mr. Rawson performed — he carried his plan into complete effect; and just as surely his noble venture, called "Clue," had capital punishment inflicted upon it. After one issue, dated May 1948, "Clue" was put to death. Perhaps it would be more appropriate, in-view of the genre with which "Clue" was concerned, to say that Mr. Rawson's magazine was murdered; if so, some crusading crime-buster, real or fictional, should investigate the case and expose the culprit (or culprits) responsible for one of the most dastardly homicides in publishing history. Your Editor offered to undertake the inquiry, unearth the facts, and reveal the truth in the pages of EQMM; but Mr. Rawson demurred. Is Mr. Rawson afraid that the unmasking of the perpetrator(s) would, in the old-fashioned phrase, rock the (publishing) Empire to its very foundations?

Be as it may, "Clue" came to life in one glorious issue, and then vanished from the sleuthian scene. A mere 7000 copies were printed of Vol. 1, No. 1, and distributed to specially selected newsstands. By this time the unsold copies have gone the way of all ephemeral publications — so that one of these days, if not already, it will be virtually impossible to beg, borrow, or buy a copy of the first and only issue of "Clue." Conceived in sincerity and dedicated to the proposition that all writers are created equal, "Clue" tried gallantly, if briefly, to break down the old taboos — to smash the literary snobbishness which has always consigned mystery reviews to left-over corners of magazine and newspaper space; it tried to gain this long-overdue recognition by giving detective-story writers a whole magazine of their own. The first issue of "Clue" proved to be a comprehensive guide to all forms of the mystery art — in books, on the stage, on the radio, in movies and in television — and contributions to the first issue included pieces by or about Helen McCloy, Howard Haycraft, John Dickson Carr, Dashiell Hammett, Anthony Boucher, Brett Halliday, Craig Rice, Hugh Pentecost, George Harmon Coxe, Lawrence G. Blochman, Fredric Brown, Lester Dent, Alfredo Segre, and Leslie Charteris (each and every one, please note in passing, a contributor to EQMM).

How could such a handbook of homicide, such a manual of murder-

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mongering, fail to enlist the enthusiastic cooperation of the entire publishing business? Remember, one out of every four books published in the United States is a mystery. Yet it is a depressing fact that at the time of this writing there is almost no likelihood of a second issue of "Clue" showing its bright cover at your favorite newsstand . . .

Now it happens that editor-publisher Rawson had too much material for his first issue. In a happier course of events this extra material would have been included in the second issue — but alas, "Clue" is dead. Now it also happens that one of the unused contributions was a double-review by Anthony Boucher on O. Henry's COPS AND ROBBERS *and Dashiell Hammett's* NIGHTMARE TOWN. *Now, finally, by an extraordinary coincidence, we had planned to include both authors, Hammett and O. Henry, in this issue of EQMM. It seems a pity to let Anthony Boucher's words of wisdom die on the vine. So we asked Tony to permit us to quote from his review — so that you can judge for yourself how clean a bull's-eye he scored in appraising the work of Hammett and O. Henry. Here are some of Mr. Boucher's cogent comments:*

"No two writers have suffered more from their imitators than O. Henry and Hammett. The pygmies have aped the trick endings of one and the tough terseness of the other without ever realizing that both essentially told stories of character — that O. Henry's surprises spring so intimately from the natures of his people that you can re-read the stories with even more pleasure when you know the gimmick; that the key scenes in Hammett are not the spectacular bloodlettings, but the quiet tense interplays of character in dialogue.

"We've long been grateful to Queen for his work in reviving and revaluating Hammett . . . And now we have further reason for gratitude in the first strictly criminous collection of O. Henry's shorts. Chosen from assorted volumes . . . they clearly establish O. Henry, hitherto not even mentioned in histories of the genre, as one of the first important American crime writers."

(Merci, Monsieur Boucher)

The Hammett story we bring you is "unknown" even to the Master's most devoted followers. For the use of its text we are deeply indebted to our good friend Leo Margolies. In "This King Business" you will accompany the "short, beefy, forty year old" detective on the most curious mission of his criminological career — to the "youngest and smallest of the Balkan States." Imagine the hardboiled Continental Op bodyguarding a "king" in Muravia! The creator of Graustark, George Barr McCutcheon, would have loved it — for George Barr McCutcheon wrote detective stories too. But most of all, remember Anthony Boucher's tip-off: "the quiet tense

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interplays of character in dialogue"; keep your eye on Colonel Einarson, on Romaine Frankl, and especially on that mountain of a man, Vasilije Djudakovich, the Minister of Police, who has a strange and selfish reason for insisting on the utmost efficiency in his organization. Djudakovich is one of the most memorable characters Dashiell Hammett has ever wrought.

Despite the operetta background and its deceptive romanticism, "This King Business" is a typical Hammett thriller — a slashing story. It blends ironic and penetrating social comment with the ripsnorting capers of a middle-aged detective "who had forgotten what it was like to believe in fairies."

THIS KING BUSINESS

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

THE train from Belgrade set me down in Stefania, capital of Muravia, in early afternoon — a rotten afternoon. Cold wind blew cold rain in my face and down my neck as I left the square granite barn of a railroad station to climb into a taxicab.

English meant nothing to the chauffeur, nor French. Good German might have failed. Mine wasn't good. It was a hodgepodge of grunts and gargles. This chauffeur was the first person who had ever pretended to understand it. I suspected him of guessing, and I expected to be taken to some distant suburban point. Maybe he was a good guesser. Anyhow, he took me to the Hotel of the Republic.

The hotel was a new six-story affair, very proud of its elevators, American plumbing, private baths, and other modern tricks. After I had washed and changed clothes I went down to the café for luncheon. Then, supplied with minute instructions in English, French, and sign-language by a highly uniformed head porter, I turned up my raincoat collar and crossed the muddy plaza to call on Roy Scanlan, United States *chargé d'affaires* in this youngest and smallest of the Balkan States.

He was a pudgy man of thirty, with smooth hair already far along the gray route, a nervous, flabby face, plump white hands that twitched, and very nice clothes. He shook hands with me, patted me into a chair, barely glanced at my letter of introduction, and stared at my necktie while saying:

"So you're a private detective from San Francisco?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"Lionel Grantham."

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"Surely not!"

"Yes."

"But he's —" The diplomat realized he was looking into my eyes, hurriedly switched his gaze to my hair, and forgot what he had started to say.

"But he's what?" I prodded him.

"Oh!" — with a vague upward motion of head and eyebrows — "not that sort."

"How long has he been here?" I asked.

"Two months. Possibly three or three and a half."

"You know him well?"

"Oh, no! By sight, of course, and to talk to. He and I are the only Americans here, so we're fairly well acquainted."

"Know what he's doing here?"

"No, I don't. He just happened to stop here in his travels, I imagine, unless, of course, he's here for some special reason. No doubt there's a girl in it — she is General Radnjak's daughter — though I don't think so."

"How does he spend his time?"

"I really haven't any idea. He lives at the Hotel of the Republic, is quite a favorite among our foreign colony, rides a bit, lives the usual life of a young man of family and wealth."

"Mixed up with anybody who isn't all he ought to be?"

"Not that I know of, except that I've seen him with Mahmoud and Einarson. They are certainly scoundrels, though they may not be."

"Who are they?"

"Nubar Mahmoud is private secretary to Doctor Semich, the President. Colonel Einarson is an Icelander, just now virtually the head of the army. I know nothing about either of them."

"Except that they are scoundrels?"

The *chargé d'affaires* wrinkled his round white forehead in pain and gave me a reproachful glance.

"Not at all," he said. "Now, may I ask, of what is Grantham suspected?"

"Nothing."

"Then?"

"Seven months ago, on his twenty-first birthday, this Lionel Grantham got hold of the money his father had left him — a nice wad. Till then the boy had had a tough time of it. His mother had, and has, highly developed middle-class notions of refinement. His father had been a genuine aristocrat in the old manner — a hard-souled, soft-spoken individual who got what he wanted by simply taking it; with a liking for old wine and young women, and plenty of both, and for cards and dice and running horses — and fights, whether he was in them or watching them.

"While he lived the boy had a he-raising. Mrs. Grantham thought her husband's tastes low, but he was a man who had things his own way. Besides, the Grantham blood was the best in America. She was a woman to be impressed by that. Eleven years ago — when Lionel was a kid of ten — the old man died. Mrs. Grantham

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swapped the family roulette wheel for a box of dominoes and began to convert the kid into a patent-leather Galahad.

"I've never seen him, but I'm told the job wasn't a success. However, she kept him bundled up for eleven years, not even letting him escape to college. So it went until the day when he was legally of age and in possession of his share of his father's estate. That morning he kisses Mamma and tells her casually that he's off for a little run around the world — alone. Mamma does and says all that might be expected of her, but it's no good. The Grantham blood is up. Lionel promises to drop her a postcard now and then, and departs.

"He seems to have behaved fairly well during his wandering. I suppose just being free gave him all the excitement he needed. But a few weeks ago the Trust Company that handles his affairs got instructions from him to turn some railroad bonds into cash and ship the money to him in care of a Belgrade bank. The amount was large — over the three million mark — so the Trust Company told Mrs. Grantham about it. She chucked a fit. She had been getting letters from him — from Paris, without a word said about Belgrade.

"Mamma was all for dashing over to Europe at once. Her brother, Senator Walbourn, talked her out of it. He did some cabling, and learned that Lionel was neither in Paris nor in Belgrade, unless he was hiding. Mrs. Grantham packed her trunks and made reservations. The Senator headed her off again, convincing her that the lad would resent her interference, telling her the best thing was to investigate on the quiet. He brought the job to the Agency. I went to Paris, learned that a friend of Lionel's there was relaying his mail, and that Lionel was here in Stefania. On the way down I stopped off in Belgrade and learned that the money was being sent here to him — most of it already has been. So here I am."

Scanlan smiled happily.

"There's nothing I can do," he said. "Grantham is of age, and it's his money."

"Right," I agreed, "and I'm in the same fix. All I can do is poke around, find out what he's up to, try to save his dough if he's being gypped. Can't you give me even a guess at the answer? Three million dollars — what could he put it into?"

"I don't know." The *chargé d'affaires* fidgeted uncomfortably. "There's no business here that amounts to anything. It's purely an agricultural country, split up among small landowners — ten, fifteen, twenty acre farms. There's his association with Einarson and Mahmoud, though. They'd certainly rob him if they got the chance. I'm positive they're robbing him. But I don't think they would. Perhaps he isn't acquainted with them. It's probably a woman."

"Well, whom should I see? I'm handicapped by not knowing the country, not knowing the language.

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To whom can I take my story and get help?"

"I don't know," he said gloomily. Then his face brightened. "Go to Vasilije Djudakovich. He is Minister of Police. He is the man for you! He can help you, and you may trust him. He has a digestion instead of a brain. He'll not understand a thing you tell him. Yes, Djudakovich is your man!"

"Thanks," I said, and staggered out into the muddy street.

I found the Minister of Police's offices in the Administration Building, a gloomy concrete pile next to the Executive Residence at the head of the plaza. In French that was even worse than my German, a thin, white-whiskered clerk, who looked like a consumptive Santa Claus, told me His Excellency was not in. Looking solemn, lowering my voice to a whisper, I repeated that I had come from the United States *chargé d'affaires*. This hocus-pocus seemed to impress Saint Nicholas. He nodded understandingly and shuffled out of the room. Presently he was back, bowing at the door, asking me to follow him.

I tailed him along a dim corridor to a wide door marked "15." He opened it, bowed me through it, wheezed, "*Asseyez-vous, s'il vous plaît,*" closed the door and left me. I was in an office, a large, square one. Everything in it was large. The four windows were double-size. The chairs were young benches, except the leather one at the desk, which could have been the rear half of a touring car. A couple of men could have slept on the desk. Twenty could have eaten at the table.

A door opposite the one through which I had come opened, and a girl came in, closing the door behind her, shutting out a throbbing purr, as of some heavy machine, that had sounded through.

"I'm Romaine Frankl," she said in English, "His Excellency's secretary. Will you tell me what it is that you wish?"

She might have been any age from twenty to thirty, something less than five feet in height, slim without boniness, with curly hair as near black as brown can get, black-lashed eyes whose gray irises had black rims, a small, delicate-featured face, and a voice that seemed too soft and faint to carry as well as it did. She wore a red woolen dress that had no shape except that which her body gave it, and when she moved — to walk or raise a hand — it was as if it cost her no energy — as if someone else were moving her.

"I'd like to see him," I said while I was accumulating this data.

"Later, certainly," she promised, "but it's impossible now." She turned, with her peculiar effortless grace, back to the door, opening it so that the throbbing purr sounded in the room again. "Hear?" she said. "He's taking his nap."

She shut the door against His Excellency's snoring and floated across

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the room to climb up in the immense leather chair at the desk.

"Do sit down," she said, wriggling a tiny forefinger at a chair beside the desk. "It will save time if you will tell me your business, because, unless you speak our tongue, I'll have to interpret your message to His Excellency."

I told her about Lionel Grantham and my interest in him, in practically the same words I had used on Scanlan, winding up:

"You see, there's nothing I can do except try to learn what the boy's up to and give him a hand if he needs it. I can't go to him — he's too much Grantham, I'm afraid, to take kindly to what he'd think was nursemaid stuff. Mr. Scanlan advised me to come to the Minister of Police."

"You were fortunate." She looked as if she wanted to make a joke about my country's representative but weren't sure how I'd take it. "Your *chargé d'affaires* is not always easy to understand."

"Once you get the hang of it, it's not hard," I said. "You just throw out all his statements that have *no's* or *not's* or *nothing's* or *don't's* in them."

"That's it! That's it, exactly!" She leaned toward me, laughing. "I've always known there was some key to it, but nobody's been able to find it before. You've solved our national problem."

"For reward, then, I should be given all the information you have about Grantham."

"You should, but I'll have to speak to His Excellency first. He'll wake presently."

"You can tell me unofficially what you think of Grantham. You know him?"

"Yes. He's charming. A nice boy, delightfully naïve, inexperienced, but really charming."

"Who are his friends here?"

She shook her head and said:

"No more of that until His Excellency wakes. You're from San Francisco? I remember the funny little street cars, and the fog, and the salad right after the soup, and Coffee Dan's."

"You've been there?"

"Twice. I was in the United States for a year and a half, in vaudeville, bringing rabbits out of hats."

We were still talking about that half an hour later when the door opened and the Minister of Police came in.

The oversize furniture immediately shrank to normal, the girl became a midget, and I felt like somebody's little boy.

This Vasilije Djudakovich stood nearly seven feet tall, and that was nothing to his girth. Maybe he wouldn't weigh more than five hundred pounds, but, looking at him, it was hard to think except in terms of tons. He was a blond-haired, blond-bearded mountain of meat in a black frock coat. He wore a necktie, so I suppose he had a collar, but it was hidden all the way around by the red rolls of his neck. His white vest

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was the size and shape of a hoop-skirt, and in spite of that it strained at the buttons. His eyes were almost invisible between the cushions of flesh around them, and were shaded into a colorless darkness, like water in a deep well. His mouth was a fat red oval among the yellow hairs of his whiskers and mustache. He came into the room slowly, ponderously, and I was surprised that the floor didn't creak nor the room tremble.

Romaine Frankl was watching me attentively as she slid out of the big leather chair and introduced me to the Minister. He gave me a fat, sleepy smile and a hand that had the general appearance of a naked baby, and let himself down slowly into the chair the girl had quit. Planted there, he lowered his head until it rested on the pillows of his several chins, and then he seemed to go to sleep.

I drew up another chair for the girl. She took another sharp look at me — she seemed to be hunting for something in my face — and began to talk to him in what I suppose was the native lingo. She talked rapidly for about twenty minutes, while he gave no sign that he was listening or that he was even awake.

When she was through, he said: "*Da.*" He spoke dreamily, but there was a volume to the syllable that could have come from no place smaller than his gigantic belly.

The girl turned to me, smiling.

"His Excellency will be glad to give you every possible assistance. Officially, of course, he does not care to interfere in the affairs of a visitor from another country, but he realizes the importance of keeping Mr. Grantham from being victimized while here. If you will return tomorrow afternoon, at, say, three o'clock . . ."

I promised to do that, thanked her, shook hands with the mountain again, and went out into the rain.

Back at the hotel, I had no trouble learning that Lionel Grantham occupied a suite on the sixth floor and was in it at that time. I had his photograph in my pocket and his description in my head. I spent what was left of the afternoon and the early evening waiting for a look at him. At a little after seven I got it.

He stepped out of the elevator, a tall, flat-backed boy with a supple body that tapered from broad shoulders to narrow hips, carried erectly on long, muscular legs — the sort of frame that tailors like. His pink, regular-featured, really handsome face wore an expression of aloof superiority that was too marked to be anything else than a cover for youthful self-consciousness.

Lighting a cigarette, he passed into the street. The rain had stopped, though clouds overhead promised more shortly. He turned down the street afoot. So did I.

We went to a much gilded restaurant two blocks from the hotel, where a gypsy orchestra played on a little balcony stuck insecurely high on one wall. All the waiters and half

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the diners seemed to know the boy. He bowed and smiled to this side and that as he walked down to a table near the far end, where two men were waiting for him.

One of them was tall and thick-bodied, with bushy dark hair and a flowing dark mustache. His florid, short-nosed face wore the expression of a man who doesn't mind a fight now and then. This one was dressed in a green and gold military uniform, with high boots of the shiniest black leather. His companion was in evening clothes, a plump, swarthy man of medium height, with oily black hair and a suave, oval face.

While young Grantham joined this pair I found a table some distance from them for myself. I ordered dinner and looked around at my neighbors. There was a sprinkling of uniforms in the room, some dress coats and evening gowns, but most of the diners were in ordinary daytime clothes. I saw a couple of faces that were probably British, a Greek or two, a few Turks. The food was good and so was my appetite. I was smoking a cigarette over a tiny cup of syrupy coffee when Grantham and the big florid officer got up and went away.

I couldn't have got my bill and paid it in time to follow them, without raising a disturbance, so I let them go. Then I settled for my meal and waited until the dark, plump man they had left behind called for his check. I was in the street a minute ahead of him, standing, looking up toward the dimly electric-lighted plaza with what was meant for the expression of a tourist who didn't quite know where to go next.

He passed me, going up the muddy street with the soft, careful-where-you-put-your-foot tread of a cat.

A soldier — a bony man in sheepskin coat and cap, with a gray mustache bristling over gray, sneering lips— stepped out of a dark doorway and stopped the swarthy man with whining words.

The swarthy man lifted hands and shoulders in a gesture that held both anger and surprise.

The soldier whined again, but the sneer on his gray mouth became more pronounced. The plump man's voice was low, sharp, angry, but he moved a hand from pocket to soldier, and the brown of Muravian paper money showed in the hand. The soldier pocketed the money, raised a hand in a salute, and went across the street.

When the swarthy man had stopped staring after the soldier, I moved toward the corner around which sheepskin coat and cap had vanished. My soldier was a block and a half down the street, striding along with bowed head. He was in a hurry. I got plenty of exercise keeping up with him. Presently the city began to thin out. The thinner it got, the less I liked this expedition. Shadowing is at its best in daytime, downtown in a familiar large city. This was shadowing at its worst.

He led me out of the city along a cement road bordered by few houses.

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I stayed as far back as I could, so he was a faint, blurred shadow ahead. He turned a sharp bend in the road. I hustled toward the bend, intending to drop back again as soon as I had rounded it. Speeding, I nearly gummed the works.

The soldier suddenly appeared around the curve, coming toward me.

A little behind me a small pile of lumber on the roadside was the only cover within a hundred feet. I stretched my short legs thither.

Irregularly piled boards made a shallow cavity in one end of the pile, almost large enough to hold me. On my knees in the mud I hunched into that cavity.

The soldier came into sight through a chink between boards. Bright metal gleamed in one of his hands. A knife, I thought. But when he halted in front of my shelter I saw it was a revolver of the old-style nickel-plated sort.

He stood still, looking at my shelter, looking up the road and down the road. He grunted, came toward me. Slivers stung my cheek as I rubbed myself flatter against the timber-ends. My gun was with my blackjack — in my gladstone bag, in my room in my hotel. A fine place to have them now! The soldier's gun was bright in his hand.

Rain began to patter on boards and ground. The soldier turned up the collar of his coat as he came. Nobody ever did anything I liked more. A man stalking another wouldn't have done that. He didn't know I was there. He was hunting a hiding place for himself. The game was even. If he found me, he had the gun, but I had seen him first.

His sheepskin coat rasped against the wood as he went by me, bending low as he passed my corner for the back of the pile, so close to me that the same raindrops seemed to be hitting both of us. I undid my fists after that. I couldn't see him, but I could hear him breathing, scratching himself, even humming.

A couple of weeks went by.

The mud I was kneeling in soaked through my pants-legs, wetting my knees and shins. The rough wood filed skin off my face every time I breathed. My mouth was as dry as my knees were wet, because I was breathing through it for silence.

An automobile came around the bend, headed for the city. I heard the soldier grunt softly, heard the click of his gun as he cocked it. The car came abreast, went on. The soldier blew out his breath and started scratching himself and humming again.

Another couple of weeks passed.

Men's voices came through the rain, barely audible, louder, quite clear. Four soldiers in sheepskin coats and hats walked down the road the way we had come, their voices presently shrinking into silence as they disappeared around the curve.

In the distance an automobile horn barked two ugly notes. The soldier grunted — a grunt that said clearly: "Here it is." His feet slopped in the

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mud, and the lumber pile creaked under his weight. I couldn't see what he was up to.

White light danced around the bend in the road, and an automobile came into view — a high-powered car going cityward with a speed that paid no attention to the wet slipperiness of the road. Rain and night and speed blurred its two occupants, who were in the front seat.

Over my head a heavy revolver roared. The soldier was working. The speeding car swayed crazily along the wet cement, its brakes screaming.

When the sixth shot told me the nickel-plated gun was probably empty, I jumped out of my hollow.

The soldier was leaning over the lumber pile, his gun still pointing at the skidding car while he peered through the rain.

He turned as I saw him, swung the gun around to me, snarled an order I couldn't understand. I was betting the gun was empty. I raised both hands high over my head, made an astonished face, and kicked him in the belly.

He folded over on me, wrapping himself around my leg. We both went down. I was underneath, but his head was against my thigh. His cap fell off. I caught his hair with both hands and yanked myself into a sitting position. His teeth went into my leg. I called him disagreeable things and put my thumbs in the hollows under his ears. It didn't take much pressure to teach him that he oughtn't to bite people. When he lifted his face to howl, I put my right fist in it, pulling him into the punch with my left hand in his hair. It was a nice solid sock.

I pushed him off my leg, got up, took a handful of his coat collar, and dragged him out into the road.

White light poured over us. Squinting into it, I saw the automobile standing down the road, its spotlight turned on me and my sparring partner. A big man in green and gold came into the light — the florid officer who had been one of Grantham's companions in the restaurant. An automatic was in one of his hands.

He strode over to us, stiff-legged in his high boots, ignored the soldier on the ground, and examined me carefully with sharp little dark eyes.

"British?" he asked.

"American."

He bit a corner of his mustache and said meaninglessly:

"Yes, that is better."

His English was guttural, with a German accent.

Lionel Grantham came from the car to us. His face wasn't as pink as it had been.

"What is it?" he asked the officer, but he looked at me.

"I don't know," I said. "I took a stroll after dinner and got mixed up on my directions. Finding myself out here, I decided I was headed the wrong way. When I turned around to go back I saw this fellow duck behind the lumber pile. He had a gun in his hand. I took him

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for a stick-up, so I played Indian on him. Just as I got to him he jumped up and began spraying you people. I reached him in time to spoil his aim. Friend of yours?"

"You're an American," the boy said. "I'm Lionel Grantham. This is Colonel Einarson. We're very grateful to you." He screwed up his forehead and looked at Einarson. "What do you think of it?"

The officer shrugged his shoulders, growled, "One of my children — we'll see," and kicked the ribs of the man on the ground.

The kick brought the soldier to life. He sat up, rolled over on hands and knees, and began a broken, long-winded entreaty, plucking at the Colonel's tunic with dirty hands.

"Ach!" Einarson knocked the hands down with a tap of pistol barrel across knuckles, looked with disgust at the muddy marks on his tunic, and growled an order.

The soldier jumped to his feet, stood at attention, got another order, did an about-face, and marched to the automobile. Colonel Einarson strode stiff-legged behind him, holding his automatic to the man's back. Grantham put a hand on my arm.

"Come along," he said. "We'll thank you properly and get better acquainted after we've taken care of this fellow."

Colonel Einarson got into the driver's seat, with the soldier beside him. Grantham waited while I found the soldier's revolver. Then we got into the rear seat. The officer looked doubtfully at me out of his eye-corners, but said nothing. He drove the car back the way it had come. He liked speed, and we hadn't far to go. By the time we were settled in our seats the car was whisking us through a gateway in a high stone wall, with a sentry on each side presenting arms. We did a sliding half-circle into a branching driveway and jerked to a stand-still in front of a square whitewashed building.

Einarson prodded the soldier out ahead of him. Grantham and I got out. To the left a row of long, low buildings showed pale gray in the rain — barracks. The door of the square, white building was opened by a bearded orderly in green. We went in. Einarson pushed his prisoner across the small reception hall and through the open door of a bedroom. Grantham and I followed them in. The orderly stopped in the doorway, traded some words with Einarson, and went away, closing the door.

The room we were in looked like a cell, except that there were no bars over the one small window. It was a narrow room, with bare, whitewashed walls and ceiling. The wooden floor, scrubbed with lye until it was almost as white as the walls, was bare. For furniture there was a black iron cot, three folding chairs of wood and canvas, and an unpainted chest of drawers, with comb, brush, and a few papers on top. That was all.

"Be seated, gentlemen," Einarson

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said, indicating the camp chairs. "We'll get at this thing now."

The boy and I sat down. The officer laid his pistol on the top of the chest of drawers, rested one elbow beside the pistol, took a corner of his mustache in one big red hand, and addressed the soldier. His voice was kindly, paternal. The soldier, standing rigidly upright in the middle of the floor, replied, whining, his eyes focused on the officer's with a blank, in-turned look.

They talked for five minutes or more. Impatience grew in the Colonel's voice and manner. The soldier kept his blank abjectness. Einarson ground his teeth together and looked angrily at the boy and me.

"This pig!" he exclaimed, and began to bellow at the soldier.

Sweat sprang out on the soldier's gray face, and he cringed out of his military stiffness. Einarson stopped bellowing at him and yelled two words at the door. It opened and the bearded orderly came in with a short, thick, leather whip. At a nod from Einarson he put the whip beside the automatic on the top of the chest of drawers and went out.

The soldier whimpered. Einarson spoke curtly to him. The soldier shuddered, began to unfasten his coat with shaking fingers, pleading all the while with whining, stuttering words. He took off his coat, his green blouse, his gray undershirt, letting them fall on the floor, and stood there, his hairy, not exactly clean body naked from the waist up. He worked his fingers together and cried.

Einarson grunted a word. The soldier stiffened at attention, hands at sides, facing us, his left side to Einarson.

Slowly Colonel Einarson removed his own belt, unbuttoned his tunic, took it off, folded it carefully, and laid it on the cot. Beneath it he wore a white cotton shirt. He rolled the sleeves up above his elbows and picked up the whip.

"This pig!" he said again.

Lionel Grantham stirred uneasily on his chair. His face was white, his eyes dark.

Leaning his left elbow on the chest of drawers again, playing with his mustache-end with his left hand, standing indolently cross-legged, Einarson began to flog the soldier. His right arm raised the whip, brought the lash whistling down to the soldier's back, raised it again, brought it down again. It was especially nasty because he was not hurrying himself, not exerting himself. He meant to flog the man until he got what he wanted, and he was saving his strength so that he could keep it up as long as necessary.

With the first blow the terror went out of the soldier's eyes. They dulled sullenly and his lips stopped twitching. He stood woodenly under the beating, staring over Grantham's head. The officer's face had also become expressionless. Anger was gone. He showed no pleasure in his work, not even that of relieving his feelings.

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His air was the air of a stoker shoveling coal, of a carpenter sawing a board, of a stenographer typing a letter. Here was a job to be done in a workmanlike manner, without haste or excitement or wasted effort, without either enthusiasm or repulsion. It was nasty, but it taught me respect for this Colonel Einarson.

Lionel Grantham sat on the edge of his folding chair, staring at the soldier with white-ringed eyes. I offered the boy a cigarette, making an unnecessarily complicated operation out of lighting it and my own — to break up his score-keeping. He had been counting the strokes, and that wasn't good for him.

The whip curved up, swished down, cracked on the naked back — up, down, up, down. Einarson's florid face took on the damp glow of moderate exercise. The soldier's gray face was a lump of putty. He was facing Grantham and me. We couldn't see the marks of the whip.

Grantham said something to himself in a whisper. Then he gasped:

"I can't stand this!"

Einarson didn't look around from his work.

"Don't stop it now," I muttered. "We've gone this far."

The boy got up unsteadily and went to the window, opened it and stood looking out into the rainy night. Einarson paid no attention to him. He was putting more weight into the whipping now, standing with his feet far apart, leaning forward a little, his left hand on his hip, his right carrying the whip up and down with increasing swiftness.

The soldier swayed and a sob shook his hairy chest. The whip cut — cut — cut. I looked at my watch. Einarson had been at it for forty minutes, and looked good for the rest of the night.

The soldier moaned and turned toward the officer. Einarson did not break the rhythm of his stroke. The lash cut the man's shoulder. I caught a glimpse of his back — raw meat. Einarson spoke sharply. The soldier jerked himself to attention again, his left side to the officer. The whip went on with its work — up, down, up, down, up, down.

The soldier flung himself on hands and knees at Einarson's feet and began to pour out sob-broken words. Einarson looked down at him, listening carefully, holding the lash of the whip in his left hand, the butt still in his right. When the man had finished, Einarson asked questions, got answers, nodded, and the soldier stood up. Einarson put a friendly hand on the man's shoulder, turned him around, looked at his mangled red back, and said something in a sympathetic tone. Then he called the orderly in and gave him some orders. The soldier, moaning as he bent, picked up his discarded clothes and followed the orderly out of the bedroom.

Einarson tossed the whip up on top of the chest of drawers and crossed to the bed to pick up his tunic. A leather pocketbook slid

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from an inside pocket to the floor. When he recovered it, a soiled newspaper clipping slipped out and floated across to my feet. I picked it up and gave it back to him — a photograph of a man, the Shah of Persia, according to the French caption under it.

"That pig!" he said — meaning the soldier, not the Shah — as he put on his tunic and buttoned it. "He has a son, also until last week of my troops. This son drinks too much of wine. I reprimand him. He is insolent. What kind of army is it without discipline? Pigs! I knock this pig down, and he produces a knife. Ach! What kind of army is it where a soldier may attack his officers with knives? After I — personally, you comprehend — have finished with this swine, I have him court-martialed and sentenced to twenty years in the prison. This elder pig, his father, does not like that. So he will shoot me tonight. Ach! What kind of army is that?"

Lionel Grantham came away from his window. His young face was haggard. His young eyes were ashamed of the haggardness of his face.

Colonel Einarson made me a stiff bow and a formal speech of thanks for spoiling the soldier's aim — which I hadn't — and saving his life. Then the conversation turned to my presence in Muravia. I told them briefly that I had held a captain's commission in the military intelligence department during the war. That much was the truth, and that was all the truth I gave them. After the war — so my fairy tale went — I had decided to stay in Europe, had taken my discharge there and had drifted around, doing odd jobs at one place and another. I was vague, trying to give them the impression that those odd jobs had not always, or usually, been ladylike. I gave them more definite — though still highly imaginary — details of my recent employment with a French syndicate, admitting that I had come to this corner of the world because I thought it better not to be seen in Western Europe for a year or so.

"Nothing I could be jailed for," I said, "but things could be made uncomfortable for me. So I roamed over into *Mitteleuropa*, learned that I might find a connection in Belgrade, got there to find it a false alarm, and came on down here. I may pick up something here. I've got a date with the Minister of Police tomorrow. I think I can show him where he can use me."

"The gross Djudakovich!" Einarson said with frank contempt. "You find him to your liking?"

"No work, no eat," I said.

"Einarson," Grantham began quickly, hesitated, then said: "Couldn't we — don't you think ——" and didn't finish.

The Colonel frowned at him, saw I had noticed the frown, cleared his throat, and addressed me in a gruffly hearty tone:

"Perhaps it would be well if you

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did not too speedily engage yourself to this fat minister. It may be — there is a possibility that we know of another field where your talents might find employment more to your taste — and profit."

I let the matter stand, saying neither yes nor no.

We returned to the city in the officer's car. He and Grantham sat in the rear. I sat beside the soldier who drove. The boy and I got out at our hotel. Einarson said good night and was driven away.

"It's early," Grantham said as we went indoors. "Come up to my room."

I stopped at my own room to wash off the mud I'd gathered around the lumber stack and to change my clothes, and then went up with him. He had three rooms on the top floor, overlooking the plaza.

He set out a bottle of whisky, a syphon, lemons, cigars, and cigarettes, and we drank, smoked, and talked. Fifteen or twenty minutes of the talk came from no deeper than the mouth on either side — comments on the night's excitement, our opinions of Stefania, and so on. Each of us had something to say to the other. Each was weighing the other before he said it.

I decided to put mine over first.

"Colonel Einarson was spoofing us tonight," I said.

"Spoofing?" The boy sat up straight, blinking.

"His soldier shot for money, not revenge."

"You mean ——?" His mouth stayed open.

"I mean the little dark man you ate with gave the soldier money."

"Mahmoud! Why, that's —— You are sure?"

"I saw it."

He looked at his feet, yanking his gaze away from mine as if he didn't want me to see that he thought I was lying.

"The soldier may have lied to Einarson," he said presently, still trying to keep me from knowing he thought me the liar. "I can understand some of the language, as spoken by the educated Muravians, but not the country dialect the soldier talked, so I don't know what he said, but he may have lied, you know."

"Not a chance," I said. "I'd bet my pants he told the truth."

He continued to stare at his outstretched feet, fighting to hold his face cool and calm. Part of what he was thinking slipped out in words:

"Of course, I owe you a tremendous debt for saving us from ——"

"You don't. You owe that to the soldier's bad aim. I didn't jump him till his gun was empty."

"But ——" His young eyes were wide before mine, and if I had pulled a machine gun out of my cuff he wouldn't have been surprised. He suspected me of everything on the blotter. I cursed myself for overplaying my hand. There was nothing to do now but spread the cards.

"Listen, Grantham. Most of what

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I told you and Einarson about myself is the bunk. Your uncle, Senator Walbourn, sent me down here. You were supposed to be in Paris. A lot of your dough was being shipped to Belgrade. The Senator was leery of the racket, didn't know whether you were playing a game or somebody was putting over a fast one. I went to Belgrade, traced you here, and came here, to run into what I ran into. I've traced the money to you, have talked to you. That's all I was hired to do. My job's done — unless there's anything I can do for you now."

"Not a thing," he said very calmly. "Thanks, just the same." He stood up, yawning. "Perhaps I'll see you again before you leave for the United States."

"Yeah." It was easy for me to make my voice match his in indifference: I hadn't a cargo of rage to hide. "Good night."

I went down to my room, got into bed, and not having anything to think about, went to sleep.

I slept till late the next morning and then had breakfast in my room. I was in the middle of it when knuckles tapped my door. A stocky man in a wrinkled gray uniform, set off with a short, thick sword, came in, saluted, gave me a square white envelope, looked hungrily at the American cigarettes on my table, smiled and took one when I offered them, saluted again, and went out.

The square envelope had my name written on it in a small, very plain and round, but not childish, handwriting. Inside was a note:

> The Minister of Police regrets that departmental affairs prevent his receiving you this afternoon.

It was signed "Romaine Frankl," and had a postscript:

> If it's convenient for you to call on me after nine this evening, perhaps I can save you some time.
>
> R. F.

Below this an address was written.

I put the note in my pocket and called: "Come in," to another set of knocking knuckles.

Lionel Grantham entered. His face was pale and set.

"Good morning," I said, making it cheerfully casual, as if I attached no importance to last night's rumpus. "Had breakfast yet? Sit down, and ——"

"Oh, yes, thanks. I've eaten." His handsome red face was reddening. "About last night — I was ——"

"Forget it! Nobody likes to have his business pried into."

"That's good of you," he said, twisting his hat in his hands. He cleared his throat. "You said you'd — ah — do — ah — help me if I wished."

"Yeah. I will. Sit down."

He sat down, coughed, ran his tongue over his lips.

"You haven't said anything to anyone about last night's affair with the soldier?"

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"No," I said.

"Will you not say anything about it?"

"Why?"

He looked at the remains of my breakfast and didn't answer. I lit a cigarette to go with my coffee and waited. He stirred uneasily in his chair and without looking up, asked:

"You know Mahmoud was killed last night?"

"The man in the restaurant with you and Einarson?"

"Yes. He was shot down in front of his house a little after midnight."

"Einarson?"

The boy jumped.

"No!" he cried. "Why do you say that?"

"Einarson knew Mahmoud had paid the soldier to wipe him out, so he plugged Mahmoud, or had him plugged. Did you tell him what I told you last night?"

"No." He blushed. "It's embarrassing to have one's family sending a guardian after one."

I made a guess:

"He told you to offer me the job he spoke of last night, and to caution me against talking about the soldier. Didn't he?"

"Y-e-s."

"Well, go ahead and offer."

"But he doesn't know you're ——"

"What are you going to do, then?" I asked. "If you don't make me the offer, you'll have to tell him why."

"Oh, Lord, what a mess!" he said wearily, putting elbows on knees, face between palms, looking at me with the harried eyes of a boy finding life too complicated.

He was ripe for talk. I grinned at him, finished my coffee, and waited.

"You know I'm not going to be led home by an ear," he said with a sudden burst of rather childish defiance.

"You know I'm not going to try to take you," I soothed him.

We had some more silence after that. I smoked while he held his head and worried. After a while he squirmed in his chair, sat stiffly upright, and his face turned perfectly crimson from hair to collar.

"I'm going to ask for your help," he said, pretending he didn't know he was blushing. "I'm going to tell you the whole foolish thing. If you laugh, I'll —— You won't laugh, will you?"

"If it's funny I probably will, but that needn't keep me from helping you."

"Yes, do laugh! It's silly! You ought to laugh!" He took a deep breath. "Did you ever — did you ever think you'd like to be a ——" he stopped; looked at me with a desperate sort of shyness, pulled himself together, and almost shouted the last word — "king?"

"Maybe. I've thought of a lot of things I'd like to be, and that might be one of 'em."

"I met Mahmoud at an embassy ball in Constantinople," he dashed into the story, dropping his words quickly as if glad to get rid of them.

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"He was President Semich's secretary. We got quite friendly, though I wasn't especially fond of him. He persuaded me to come here with him, and introduced me to Colonel Einarson. Then they — there's really no doubt that the country is wretchedly governed. I wouldn't have gone into it if that hadn't been so.

"A revolution was being prepared. The man who was to lead it had just died. It was handicapped, too, by a lack of money. Believe this — it wasn't all vanity that made me go into it. I believed — I still believe — that it would have been — will be — for the good of the country. The offer they made me was that if I would finance the revolution I could be — could be king.

"Now wait! The Lord knows it's bad enough, but don't think it sillier than it is. The money I have would go a long way in this small, impoverished country. Then, with an American ruler, it would be easier — it ought to be — for the country to borrow in America or England. Then there's the political angle. Muravia is surrounded by four countries, any one of which is strong enough to annex it if it wants. Muravia has stayed independent so far only because of the jealousy among its stronger neighbors and because it hasn't a seaport.

"But with an American ruler — and if loans in America and England were arranged, so we had their capital invested here — there would be a change in the situation. Muravia would be in a stronger position, would have at least some slight claim on the friendship of stronger powers. That would be enough to make the neighbors cautious.

"Albania, shortly after the first World War, thought of the same thing, and offered its crown to one of the wealthy American Bonapartes. He didn't want it. He was an older man and had already made his career. I did want my chance when it came. There were" — some of the embarrassment that had left him during his talking returned — "there were kings back in the Grantham lines. We trace our descent from James the Fourth, of Scotland. I wanted — it was nice to think of carrying the line back to a crown.

"We weren't planning a violent revolution. Einarson holds the army. We simply had to use the army to force the Deputies — those who were not already with us — to change the form of government and elect me king. My descent would make it easier than if the candidate were one who hadn't royal blood in him. It would give me a certain standing in spite — in spite of my being young, and — and the people really want a king, especially the peasants. They don't think they're really entitled to call themselves a nation without one. A president means nothing to them — he's simply an ordinary man like themselves. So, you see, I —— It was —— Go ahead, laugh! You've heard enough to know how silly it is!" His voice

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was high-pitched, screechy. "Laugh! Why don't you laugh?"

"What for?" I asked. "It's crazy, God knows, but not silly. Your judgment was gummy, but your nerve's all right. You've been talking as if this were all dead and buried. Has it flopped?"

"No, it hasn't," he said slowly, frowning, "but I keep thinking it has. Mahmoud's death shouldn't change the situation, yet I've a feeling it's all over."

"Much of your money sunk?"

"I don't mind that. But — well — suppose the American newspapers get hold of the story, and they probably will. You know how ridiculous they could make it. And then the others who'll know about it — my mother and uncle and the Trust Company. I won't pretend I'm not ashamed to face them. And then ——" His face got red and shiny. "And then Valeska — Miss Radnjak — her father was to have led the revolution. He did lead it — until he was murdered. She is — I never could be good enough for her." He said this in a peculiarly idiotic tone of awe. "But I've hoped that perhaps by carrying on her father's work, and if I had something besides mere money to offer her — if I had done something — made a place for myself — perhaps she'd — you know."

I said: "Uh-huh."

"What shall I do?" he asked earnestly. "I can't run away. I've got to see it through for her, and to keep my own self-respect. But I've got the feeling that it's all over. You offered to help me. Help me. Tell me what I ought to do!"

"You'll do what I tell you — if I promise to bring you through with a clean face?" I asked, just as if steering millionaire descendants of Scotch kings through Balkan plots were an old story to me, merely part of the day's work.

"Yes!"

"What's the next thing on the revolutionary program?"

"There's a meeting tonight. I'm to bring you."

"What time?"

"Midnight."

"I'll meet you here at eleven thirty. How much am I supposed to know?"

"I was to tell you about the plot, and to offer you whatever inducements were necessary to bring you in. There was no definite arrangement as to how much or how little I was to tell you."

At nine thirty that night a cab set me down in front of the address the Minister of Police's secretary had given in her note. It was a small two-story house in a badly paved street on the city's eastern edge. A middle-aged woman in very clean, stiffly starched, ill-fitting clothes opened the door for me. Before I could speak, Romaine Frankl, in a sleeveless pink satin gown, floated into sight behind the woman, smiling, holding out a small hand to me.

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"I didn't know you'd come," she said.

"Why?" I asked, with a great show of surprise at the notion that any man would ignore an invitation from her, while the servant closed the door and took my coat and hat.

We were standing in a dull-rose-papered room, finished and carpeted with oriental richness. There was one discordant note in the room — an immense leather chair.

"We'll go upstairs," the girl said, and addressed the servant with words that meant nothing to me, except the name Marya. "Or would you" — she turned to me and English again — "prefer beer to wine?"

I said I wouldn't, and we went upstairs, the girl climbing ahead of me with her effortless appearance of being carried. She took me into a black, white, and gray room that was very daintily furnished with as few pieces as possible, its otherwise perfect feminine atmosphere spoiled by the presence of another of the big padded chairs.

The girl sat on a gray divan, pushing away a stack of French and Austrian magazines to make a place for me beside her. Through an open door I could see the painted foot of a Spanish bed, a short stretch of purple counterpane, and half of a purple-curtained window.

"His Excellency was very sorry," the girl began, and stopped.

I was looking — not staring — at the big leather chair. I knew she had stopped because I was looking at it, so I wouldn't take my eyes away.

"Vasilije," she said, more distinctly than was really necessary, "was very sorry he had to postpone this afternoon's appointment. The assassination of the President's secretary — you heard of it? — made us put everything else aside for the moment."

"Oh, yes, that fellow Mahmoud —" slowly shifting my eyes from the leather chair to her. "Found out who killed him?"

Her black-ringed, black-centered eyes seemed to study me from a distance while she shook her head, jiggling the nearly black curls.

"Probably Einarson," I said.

"You haven't been idle." Her lower lids lifted when she smiled, giving her eyes a twinkling effect.

The servant Marya came in with wine and fruit, put them on a small table beside the divan, and went away. The girl poured wine and offered me cigarettes in a silver box. I passed them up for one of my own. She smoked a king-size Egyptian cigarette — big as a cigar. It accentuated the smallness of her face and hand — which is probably why she favored that size.

"What sort of revolution is this they've sold my boy?" I asked.

"It was a very nice one until it died."

"How come it died?"

"It — do you know anything about our history?"

"No."

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"Well, Muravia came into existence as a result of the fear and jealousy of four countries. The nine or ten thousand square miles that make this country aren't very valuable land. There's little here that any of those four countries especially wanted, but no three of them would agree to let the fourth have it. The only way to settle the thing was to make a separate country out of it. That was done in 1923.

"Doctor Semich was elected the first president, for a ten-year term. He is not a statesman, not a politician, and never will be. But since he was the only Muravian who had ever been heard of outside his own town, it was thought that his election would give the new country some prestige. Besides, it was a fitting honor for Muravia's only great man. He was not meant to be anything but a figurehead. The real governing was to be done by General Danilo Radnjak, who was elected vice-president, which, here, is more than equivalent to Prime Minister. General Radnjak was a capable man. The army worshiped him, the peasants trusted him, and our *bourgeoisie* knew him to be honest, conservative, intelligent, and as good a business administrator as a military one.

"Doctor Semich is a very mild, elderly scholar with no knowledge whatever of worldly affairs. You can understand him from this — he is easily the greatest of living bacteriologists, but he'll tell you, if you are on intimate terms with him, that he doesn't believe in the value of bacteriology at all. 'Mankind must learn to live with bacteria as with friends,' he'll say. 'Our bodies must adapt themselves to diseases, so there will be little difference between having tuberculosis, for example, or not having it. That way lies victory. This making war on bacteria is a futile business. Futile but interesting. So we do it. Our poking around in laboratories is perfectly useless — but it amuses us.'

"Now when this delightful old dreamer was honored by his countrymen with the presidency, he took it in the worst possible way. He determined to show his appreciation by locking up his laboratory and applying himself heart and soul to running the government. Nobody expected or wanted that. Radnjak was to have been the government. For a while he did control the situation, and everything went well enough.

"But Mahmoud had designs of his own. He was Doctor Semich's secretary, and he was trusted. He began calling the President's attention to various trespasses of Radnjak's on the presidential powers. Radnjak, in an attempt to keep Mahmoud from control, made a terrible mistake. He went to Doctor Semich and told him frankly and honestly that no one expected him, the President, to give all his time to executive business, and that it had been the intention of his countrymen to give him the honor of being the first president rather than the duties.

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"Radnjak had played into Mahmoud's hands — the secretary became the actual government. Doctor Semich was now thoroughly convinced that Radnjak was trying to steal his authority, and from that day on Radnjak's hands were tied. Doctor Semich insisted on handling every governmental detail himself, which meant that Mahmoud handled it, because the President knows as little about statesmanship today as he did when he took office. Complaints — no matter who made them — did no good. Doctor Semich considered every dissatisfied citizen a fellow-conspirator of Radnjak's. The more Mahmoud was criticized in the Chamber of Deputies, the more faith Doctor Semich had in him. Last year the situation became intolerable, and the revolution began to form.

"Radnjak headed it, of course, and at least ninety percent of the influential men in Muravia were in it. The attitude of people as a whole, it is difficult to judge. They are mostly peasants, small landowners, who ask only to be let alone. But there's no doubt they'd rather have a king than a president, so the form was to be changed to please them. The army, which worshiped Radnjak, was in it. The revolution matured slowly. General Radnjak was a cautious, careful man, and, as this is not a wealthy country, there was not much money available.

"Two months before the date set for the outbreak, Radnjak was assassinated. And the revolution went to pieces, split up into half a dozen factions. There was no other man strong enough to hold them together. Some of these groups still meet and conspire, but they are without general influence, without real purpose. And this is the revolution that has been sold Lionel Grantham. We'll have more information in a day or two, but what we've learned so far is that Mahmoud, who spent a month's vacation in Constantinople, brought Grantham back here with him and joined forces with Einarson to swindle the boy.

"Mahmoud was very much out of the revolution, of course, since it was aimed at him. But Einarson had been in it with his superior, Radnjak. Since Radnjak's death Einarson has succeeded in transferring to himself much of the allegiance that the soldiers gave the dead general. They do not love the Icelander as they did Radnjak, but Einarson is spectacular, theatrical — has all the qualities that simple men like to see in their leaders. So Einarson had the army and could get enough of the late revolution's machinery in his hands to impress Grantham. For money he'd do it. So he and Mahmoud put on a show for your boy. They used Valeska Radnjak, the general's daughter, too. She, I think, was also a dupe. I've heard that the boy and she are planning to be king and queen. How much did he invest in this little farce?"

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"Maybe as much as three million American dollars."

Romaine Frankl whistled softly and poured more wine.

"How did the Minister of Police stand, when the revolution was alive?" I asked.

"Vasilije," she told me, sipping wine between phrases, "is a peculiar man, an original. He is interested in nothing except his comfort. Comfort to him means enormous amounts of food and drink and at least sixteen hours of sleep each day, and not having to move around much during his eight waking hours. Outside of that he cares for nothing. To guard his comfort he has made the police department a model one. They've got to do their work smoothly and neatly. If they don't, crimes will go unpunished, people will complain, and those complaints might disturb His Excellency. He might even have to shorten his afternoon nap to attend a conference or meeting. That wouldn't do. So he insists on an organization that will keep crime down to a minimum, and catch the perpetrators of that minimum. And he gets it."

"Catch Radnjak's assassin?"

"Killed resisting arrest ten minutes after the murder."

"One of Mahmoud's men?"

The girl emptied her glass, frowning at me.

"You're not so bad," she said slowly, "but now it's my turn to ask: Why did you say Einarson killed Mahmoud?"

"Einarson knew Mahmoud had tried to have him and Grantham shot earlier in the evening."

"Really?"

"I saw a soldier take money from Mahmoud, ambush Einarson and Grantham, and miss 'em with six shots."

She clicked a fingernail against her teeth.

"That's not like Mahmoud," she objected, "to be seen paying for his murders."

"Probably not," I agreed. "But suppose his hired man decided he wanted more pay, or maybe he'd only been paid part of his wages. What better way to collect than to pop out and ask for it in the street a few minutes before he was scheduled to turn the trick?"

She nodded, and spoke as if thinking aloud:

"Then they've got all they expect to get from Grantham, and each was trying to hog it by removing the other."

"Where you go wrong," I told her, "is in thinking that the revolution is dead."

"But Mahmoud wouldn't, for three million dollars, conspire to remove himself from power."

"Right! Mahmoud thought he was putting on a show for the boy. When he learned it wasn't a show — learned Einarson was in earnest — he tried to have him knocked off."

"Perhaps." She shrugged her smooth bare shoulders. "But now you're guessing."

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"Yes? Einarson carries a picture of the Shah of Persia. It's worn, as if he handled it a lot. The Shah of Persia is a Russian soldier who went in there after the war, worked himself up until he had the army in his hands, became dictator, then Shah. Correct me if I'm wrong. Einarson is an Icelandic soldier who came in here after the war and has worked himself up until he's got the army in his hands. If he carries the Shah's picture and looks at it often enough to have it shabby from handling, does it mean he hopes to follow his example? Or doesn't it?"

Romaine Frankl got up and roamed around the room, moving a chair two inches here, adjusting an ornament there, shaking out the folds of a window curtain, pretending a picture wasn't quite straight on the wall, moving from place to place with the appearance of being carried — a graceful small girl in pink satin.

She stopped in front of a mirror, moved a little to one side so she could see my reflection in it, and fluffed her curls while saying:

"Very well, Einarson wants a revolution. What will your boy do?"

"What I tell him."

"What will you tell him?"

"Whatever pays best. I want to take him home with all his money."

She left the mirror and came over to me, rumpled my hair, kissed my mouth, and sat on my knees, holding my face between small warm hands.

"Give me a revolution, nice man!" Her eyes were black with excitement, her voice throaty, her mouth laughing, her body trembling. "I detest Einarson. Use him and break him for me. But give me a revolution!"

I laughed, kissed her, and turned her around on my lap so her head would fit against my shoulder.

"We'll see," I promised. "I'm to meet the folks at midnight. Maybe I'll know then."

"You'll come back after the meeting?"

"Try to keep me away!"

I got back to the hotel at eleven thirty, loaded my hips with gun and blackjack, and went upstairs to Grantham's suite. He was alone, but said he expected Einarson. He seemed glad to see me.

"Tell me, did Mahmoud go to any of the meetings?" I asked.

"No. His part in the revolution was hidden even from most of those in it. There were reasons why he couldn't appear."

"There were. The chief one was that everybody knew he didn't want any revolts, didn't want anything but money."

Grantham chewed his lower lip and said: "Oh, Lord, what a mess!"

Colonel Einarson arrived, in a dinner coat, but very much the soldier, the man of action. His hand-clasp was stronger than it needed to be. His little dark eyes were hard and bright.

"You are ready, gentlemen?" he addressed the boy and me as if we were a multitude. "Excellent! We

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shall go now. There will be difficulties tonight. Mahmoud is dead. There will be those of our friends who will ask: 'Why now revolt?' Ach!" He yanked a corner of his flowing dark mustache. "I will answer that. Good souls, our confrères, but given to timidity. There is no timidity under capable leadership. You shall see!"

We left the hotel, got into a machine, rode seven blocks, and went into a small hotel on a side street. The porter bowed to the belt when he opened the door for Einarson. Grantham and I followed the officer up a flight of stairs, down a dim hall. A fat, greasy man in his fifties came bowing and clucking to meet us. Einarson introduced him to me — the proprietor of the hotel. He took us into a low-ceilinged room where thirty or forty men got up from chairs and looked at us through tobacco smoke.

Einarson made a short, very formal speech which I couldn't understand, introducing me to the gang. I ducked my head at them and found a seat beside Grantham.

Colonel Einarson smoothed his mustache and began to talk to this one and that, shouting over the clamor of other voices when necessary. In an undertone Lionel Grantham pointed out the more important conspirators to me — a dozen or more members of the Chamber of Deputies, a banker, a brother of the Minister of Finance (supposed to represent that official), half a dozen officers (all in civilian clothes tonight), three professors from the university.

The banker, a white-bearded fat man of sixty, stood up and began a speech, staring intently at Einarson. He spoke deliberately, softly, but with a faintly defiant air. The Colonel didn't let him get far.

"Ach!" Einarson barked and reared up on his feet. None of the words he said meant anything to me, but they took the pinkness out of the banker's cheeks and brought uneasiness into the eyes around us.

"They want to call it off," Grantham whispered in my ear. "They won't go through with it now. I know they won't."

The meeting became rough. A lot of people were yelping at once, but nobody talked down Einarson's bellow. Everybody was standing up, either very red or very white in the face. Fists, fingers, and heads were shaking. The Minister of Finance's brother — a slender, elegantly dressed man with a long, intelligent face — took off his nose-glasses so savagely that they broke in half, screamed words at Einarson, spun on his heel, and walked to the door.

He pulled it open and stopped.

The hall was full of green uniforms. Soldiers leaned against the wall, sat on their heels, stood in little groups. They hadn't guns — only bayonets in scabbards at their sides. The Minister of Finance's brother stood very still at the door, looking at the soldiers.

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Then somebody closed the door. Everybody sat down. Einarson made another speech. Nobody interrupted him. The white-whiskered banker made another speech. The Minister of Finance's brother rose to say half a dozen polite words, staring near-sightedly at Einarson, holding half of his broken glasses in each slender hand. Grantham, at a word from Einarson, got up and talked. Everybody listened very respectfully.

Einarson spoke again. Everybody got excited. Everybody talked at once. It went on for a long time. Grantham explained to me that the revolution would start early Thursday morning — it was now early Wednesday morning — and that the details were now being arranged for the last time. I doubted that anybody was going to know anything about the details, with all this hubbub going on. They kept it up until half-past three. The last couple of hours I spent dozing in a chair.

Grantham and I walked back to our hotel after the meeting. He told me we were to gather in the plaza at four o'clock the next morning. It would be daylight by six, and by then the government buildings, the President, most of the officials and Deputies who were not on our side, would be in our hands. A meeting of the Chamber of Deputies would be held under the eyes of Einarson's troops, and everything would be done as swiftly and regularly as possible.

I was to accompany Grantham as a sort of bodyguard, which meant, I imagined, that both of us were to be kept out of the way as much as possible. That was all right with me.

I left Grantham at the fifth floor, went to my room, ran cold water over my face and hands, and then left the hotel again. There was no chance of getting a cab at this hour, so I set out afoot for Romaine Frankl's house.

I had a little excitement on the way.

A wind was blowing in my face as I walked. I stopped and put my back to it to light a cigarette. A shadow down the street slid over into a building's shadow. I was being tailed, and not very skillfully. I finished lighting my cigarette and went on my way until I came to a sufficiently dark side street. Turning into it, I stopped in a street-level dark doorway.

A man came puffing around the corner. My first crack at him went wrong — the blackjack took him too far forward, on the cheek. The second one got him fairly behind the ear. I left him sleeping there and went on to Romaine Frankl's house.

The servant Marya, in a woolly gray bathrobe, opened the door and sent me up to the black, white, and gray room, where the Minister's secretary, still in the pink gown, was propped up among cushions on the divan. A tray full of cigarette butts showed how she'd been spending her time.

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"Well?" she asked as I moved her over to make a seat for myself beside her.

"Thursday morning at four we revolute."

"I knew you'd do it," she said, patting my hand.

"It did itself, though there were a few minutes when I could have stopped it by simply knocking our Colonel behind the ear and letting the rest of them tear him apart. That reminds me — somebody's hired man tried to follow me here tonight."

"What sort of a man?"

"Short, beefy, forty — just about my size and age."

"But he didn't succeed?"

"I slapped him flat and left him sleeping there."

She laughed and pulled my ear.

"That was Gopchek, our very best detective. He'll be furious."

"Well, don't sic any more of 'em on me. You can tell him I'm sorry I had to hit him twice, but it was his own fault. He shouldn't have jerked his head back the first time."

She laughed, then frowned, finally settling on an expression that held half of each.

"Tell me about the meeting," she commanded.

I told her what I knew. When I had finished she pulled my head down to kiss me, and held it down to whisper:

"You do trust me, don't you, dear?"

"Yeah. Just as much as you trust me."

"That's far from being enough," she said, pushing my face away with a hand flat against my nose.

Marya came in with a tray of food. We pulled the table around in front of the divan and ate.

"I don't quite understand you," Romaine said over a stalk of asparagus. "If you don't trust me why do you tell me things? As far as I know, you haven't done much lying to me. Why should you tell me the truth if you've no faith in me?"

"My susceptible nature," I explained. "I'm so overwhelmed by your beauty and charm and one thing and another that I can't refuse you anything."

"You don't trust me," she insisted. "Then why do you put yourself in my hands?"

"Why not? You can make a flop of the revolution. That's nothing to me. It's not my party, and its failure needn't mean that I can't get the boy out of the country with his money."

"You don't mind a prison, an execution, perhaps?"

"I'll take my chances," I said. But what I was thinking was: if, after twenty years of scheming and slickering in big-time cities, I let myself get trapped in this hill village, I'd deserve all I got.

She laughed, put a hand over my mouth, and said:

"I understand. You love me, but not enough to let me interfere with your plans. I don't like that. It's effeminate."

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"You going to turn out for the revolution?" I asked.

"I'm not going to run through the streets throwing bombs, if that's what you mean."

"And Djudakovich?"

"He sleeps till eleven in the morning. If you start at four, you'll have seven hours before he's up." She said all this perfectly seriously. "Get it done in that time. Or he might decide to stop it."

"Yeah? I had a notion he wanted it."

"Vasilije wants nothing but peace and comfort."

"But listen, sweetheart," I protested. "If your Vasilije is any good at all, he can't help finding out about it ahead of time. Einarson and his army are the revolution. These bankers and deputies and the like that he's carrying with him to give the party a responsible look are a lot of movie conspirators. Look at 'em! They hold their meetings at midnight, and all that kind of foolishness. Now that they're actually signed up to something, they won't be able to keep from spreading the news. All day they'll be going around trembling and whispering together in odd corners."

"They've been doing that for months," she said. "Nobody pays any attention to them. And I promise you Vasilije shan't hear anything new. I won't tell him, and he never listens to anything anyone else says."

"All right." I wasn't sure it was all right, but it might be. "Now this row is going through — if the army follows Einarson?"

"Yes, and the army will follow him."

"Then, after it's over, our real job begins?"

She rubbed a flake of cigarette ash into the table cloth with a small pointed finger, and said nothing.

"Einarson's got to be dumped," I continued.

"We'll have to kill him," she said thoughtfully. "You'd better do it yourself."

I saw Einarson and Grantham that evening, and spent several hours with them. The boy was fidgety, nervous, without confidence in the revolution's success, though he tried to pretend he was taking things as a matter of course. Einarson was full of words. He gave us every detail of the next day's plans. I was more interested in him than in what he was saying. He could put the revolution over, I thought, and I was willing to leave it to him. So while he talked I studied him, combing him over for weak spots.

Mentally, he wasn't a heavyweight. His revolution was crude stuff. It would get over chiefly because there wasn't much opposition. He had plenty of will-power, I imagined, but I didn't put a big number on that. People who haven't much brains have to develop will-power to get anywhere. I didn't know whether he had guts or not, but before an

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audience I guessed he'd make a grand showing, and most of this act would be before an audience. Off in a dark corner I had an idea he would go watery. He believed in himself — absolutely. That's ninety percent of leadership, so there was no flaw in him there. He didn't trust me. He had taken me in because as things turned out it was easier to do so than to shut the door against me.

He kept on talking about his plans. There was nothing to talk about. He was going to bring his soldiers in town in the early morning and take over the government. That was all the plan that was needed. The rest of it was the lettuce around the dish, but this lettuce part was the only part we could discuss. It was dull.

At eleven o'clock Einarson stopped talking and left us, making this sort of speech:

"Until four o'clock, gentlemen, when Muravia's history begins." He put a hand on my shoulder and commanded me: "Guard His Majesty!"

I said, "Uh-huh," and immediately sent His Majesty to bed. He wasn't going to sleep, but he was too young to confess it, so he went off willingly enough. I got a taxi and went out to Romaine's.

She was like a child the night before a picnic. She kissed me and she kissed the servant Marya. She sat on my knees, beside me, on the floor, on all the chairs, changing her location every half-minute. She laughed and talked incessantly, about the revolution, about me, about herself, about anything at all.

I left at three o'clock. She went down to the door with me, pulled my head down to kiss my eyes and mouth.

I walked back to the hotel through the dark streets — the lights were turned off at midnight — without seeing a single other person, not even one of the gray-uniformed policemen. By the time I reached home rain was falling steadily.

In my room I changed into heavier clothes and shoes, dug an extra gun — an automatic — out of my bag and hung it in a shoulder holster. Then I filled my pocket with enough ammunition to make me bow-legged, picked up hat and raincoat, and went upstairs to Lionel Grantham's suite.

"It's ten to four," I told him. "We might as well go down to the plaza. Better put a gun in your pocket."

He got into an overcoat, and we went downstairs.

Rain drove into our faces as we went toward the center of the dark plaza. Other figures moved around us, though none came near. We halted at the foot of an iron statue of somebody on a horse.

The rumble of other voices began to compete with the patter of rain. The fat, white-whiskered face of the banker who had been at the meeting appeared suddenly out of the darkness and went back into it just as suddenly, as if he didn't want to be recognized. Men I hadn't seen be-

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fore gathered around us, saluting Grantham with a sheepish sort of respect. A little man in a too big cape ran up and began to tell us something in a cracked, jerky voice. A thin, stooped man with glasses freckled by raindrops translated the little man's story into English for us:

"He says the artillery has betrayed us, and guns are being mounted in the government buildings to sweep the plaza at daybreak." There was an odd sort of hopefulness in his voice, and he added: "In that event we can, naturally, do nothing."

"We can die," Lionel Grantham said gently.

There wasn't the least bit of sense to that crack. Nobody was here to die. They were all here because it was so unlikely that anybody would have to die, except perhaps a few of Einarson's soldiers. That's the sensible view of the boy's speech. But it's God's own truth that even I — a middle-aged detective who had forgotten what it was like to believe in fairies — felt suddenly warm inside my wet clothes. And if anybody had said to me: "This boy is a real king," I wouldn't have argued the point.

An abrupt hush came in the murmuring around us, leaving only the rustle of rain, and the tramp, tramp, tramp of orderly marching up the street — Einarson's men.

An officer in a glistening slicker pushed through the crowd — a small, dapper boy with too large a sword. He saluted Grantham elaborately, and said in English, of which he seemed proud:

"Colonel Einarson's respects, Mister, and this progress goes betune."

I wondered what the last word meant.

Grantham smiled and said: "Convey my thanks to Colonel Einarson."

The rain soaked us. We shifted our feet, shivered, and talked. Daylight came slowly, showing more and more who stood around us wet and curious-eyed. On the edge of the crowd men burst into cheers. The rest of them took it up. They forgot their wet misery, laughed and danced, hugged and kissed one another. A bearded man in a leather coat came to us, bowed to Grantham, and explained that Einarson's own regiment could be seen occupying the Administration Building and the Executive Residence.

Day came fully. The mob around us opened to make way for an automobile that was surrounded by a squad of cavalrymen. It stopped in front of us. Colonel Einarson, holding a bare sword in his hand, stepped out of the car, saluted, and held the door open for Grantham and me. He followed us in, smelling of victory like a chorus girl of Coty. The cavalrymen closed around the car again, and we were driven to the Administration Building, through a crowd that yelled and ran red-faced and happy after us. It was all quite theatrical.

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"The city is ours," said Einarson, leaning forward in his seat, his sword's point on the car floor, his hands on its hilt. "The President, the Deputies, nearly every official of importance, is taken. Not a single shot fired, not a window broken!"

We got out at the Administration Building, walking up the steps between rows of infantrymen at present-arms, rain sparkling on their fixed bayonets. More green-uniformed soldiers presented arms along the corridors. We went into an elaborately furnished dining-room, where fifteen or twenty officers stood up to receive us. There were lots of speeches made.

After the meal we went to the Deputies' Chamber, a large, oval room with curved rows of benches and desks facing a raised platform. Besides three desks on the platform, some twenty chairs had been put there, facing the curved seats. Our breakfast party occupied these chairs. I noticed that Grantham and I were the only civilians on the platform. None of our fellow conspirators were there, except those who were in Einarson's army. I wasn't so fond of that.

Grantham sat in the first row of chairs, between Einarson and me. We looked down on the Deputies. There were perhaps a hundred of them distributed among the curved benches, split sharply in two groups. Half of them, on the right side of the room, were revolutionists. They stood up and hurrahed at us. The other half, on the left, were prisoners.

Around the room, shoulder to shoulder against the wall except on the platform and where the doors were, stood Einarson's soldiers.

An old man came in between two soldiers — a mild-eyed old gentleman, bald, stooped, with a wrinkled, clean-shaven, scholarly face.

"Doctor Semich," Grantham whispered.

The President's guards took him to the center one of the three desks on the platform.

A red-haired Deputy — one of the revolutionary party — got up and talked. His fellows cheered when he had finished. The President spoke — three words in a very dry, very calm voice, and left the platform to walk back the way he had come, the two soldiers accompanying him.

"Refused to resign," Grantham informed me.

The red-haired Deputy came up on the platform and took the center desk. The legislative machinery began to grind. Men talked briefly, apparently to the point — revolutionists. None of the prisoner Deputies rose. A vote was taken. A few of the in-wrongs didn't vote. Most of them seemed to vote with the ins.

"They've revoked the constitution," Grantham whispered.

The Deputies were hurrahing again — those who were there voluntarily. Einarson leaned over and mumbled to Grantham and me:

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"That is as far as we may safely go today. It leaves all in our hands."

"Time to listen to a suggestion?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Will you excuse us a moment?" I said to Grantham, and got up and walked to one of the rear corners of the platform.

Einarson followed me, frowning suspiciously.

"Why not give Grantham his crown now?" I asked when we were standing in the corner, my right shoulder touching his left, half facing each other, half facing the corner, our backs to the officers who sat on the platform, the nearest less than ten feet away. "Push it through. You can do it. There'll be a howl, of course. Tomorrow, as a concession to that howl, you'll make him abdicate. You'll get credit for that. You'll be fifty percent stronger with the people. Then you will be in a position to make it look as if the revolution was his party, and that you were the patriot who kept this newcomer from grabbing the throne. Meanwhile you'll be dictator, and whatever else you want to be when the time comes. See what I mean? Let him bear the brunt. You catch yours on the rebound."

He liked the idea, but he didn't like it to come from me.

"Why should you suggest this?" he asked.

"What do you care? I promise you he'll abdicate within twenty-four hours."

He smiled under his mustache and raised his head. I knew a major in the A. E. F. who always raised his head like that when he was going to issue an unpleasant order. I spoke quickly:

"My raincoat — do you see it's folded over my left arm?"

He said nothing, but his eyelids crept together.

"You can't see my left hand," I went on.

His eyes were slits, but he said nothing.

"There's an automatic in it," I wound up.

"Well?" he asked contemptuously.

"Nothing — only — get funny, and I'll let your guts out."

"Ach!" — he didn't take me seriously — "and after that?"

"I don't know. Think it over carefully, Einarson. I've deliberately put myself in a position where I've got to go ahead if you don't give in. I can kill you before you do anything. I'm going to do it if you don't give Grantham his crown now. Understand? I've got to. Maybe — most likely — your boys would get me afterward, but you'd be dead. If I back down now, you'll certainly have me shot. So I can't back down. If neither of us backs down, we'll both take the leap. *I've* gone too far to weaken now. *You'll* have to give in. Think it over. I can't possibly be bluffing."

He thought it over. Some of the color washed out of his face, and a little rippling movement appeared in

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the flesh of his chin. I crowded him along by moving the raincoat enough to show him the muzzle of the gun that actually was there in my left hand. I had the big heaver — he hadn't nerve enough to take a chance on dying in his hour of victory. A little earlier, a little later, I might have had to gun him. Now I had him.

He strode across the platform to the desk at which the red-head sat, drove the red-head away with a snarl and a gesture, leaned over the desk, and bellowed down into the chamber.

No Deputy made a sound for a long minute after the Colonel's bellow had stopped. Then one of the anti-revolutionists jumped to his feet and yelped bitterly. Einarson pointed a long brown finger at him. Two soldiers left their places by the wall, took the Deputy roughly by neck and arms, and dragged him out.

Einarson put a question and got a unanimous answer.

He turned to me, his gaze darting from my face to my raincoat and back, and said: "That is done."

"We'll have the coronation now," I commanded. "Any kind of ceremony, so it's short."

I missed most of the ceremony. I was busy keeping my hold on the florid officer, but finally Lionel Grantham was officially installed as Lionel the First, King of Muravia. Einarson and I congratulated him, or whatever it was, together. Then I took the officer aside.

"We're going to take a walk," I said. "No foolishness. Take me out of a side door."

I had him now, almost without needing the gun. He would have to deal quietly with Grantham and me — kill us without any publicity — if he were to avoid being laughed at — this man who had let himself be stuck up and robbed of a throne in the middle of his army.

We went roundabout from the Administration Building to the Hotel of the Republic without meeting anyone who knew us. The population was all in the plaza. We found the hotel deserted. I made him run the elevator to my floor, and herded him down the corridor to my room.

I tried the door, found it unlocked, let go the knob, and told him to go in. He pushed the door open and stopped.

Romaine Frankl was sitting cross-legged in the middle of my bed, sewing a button on one of my union suits.

I prodded Einarson into the room and closed the door. Romaine looked at him and at the automatic that was now uncovered in my hand. With burlesque disappointment she said:

"Oh, you haven't killed him yet!"

Colonel Einarson stiffened. He had an audience now — one that saw his humiliation. He was likely to do something. I'd have to handle him with gloves, or — maybe the other way was better. I kicked him on the ankle and snarled: "Get over in the corner and sit down!"

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He spun around to me. I jabbed the muzzle of the pistol in his face, grinding his lip between it and his teeth. When his head jerked back I slammed him in the belly with my other fist. He grabbed for air with a wide mouth. I pushed him over to a chair in one corner of the room.

Romaine laughed and shook a finger at me, saying:

"You're a rowdy!"

"What else can I do?" I protested, chiefly for my prisoner's benefit. "When somebody's watching him he gets notions that he's a hero. I stuck him up and made him crown the boy king. But this bird has still got the army, which is the government. I can't let go of him, or both Lionel the Once and I will gather lead. It hurts me more than it does him to have to knock him around, but I can't help myself. I've got to keep him sensible."

"You're doing wrong by him," she replied. "You've got no right to mistreat him. The only polite thing for you to do is to cut his throat in a gentlemanly manner."

"Ach!" Einarson's lungs were working again.

"Shut up," I yelled at him, "or I'll come over there and knock you double-jointed."

"We'll give him to Vasilije," she said, swinging her feet over the side of the bed and standing up. "He'll know what to do."

"Where is he?"

"Upstairs in Grantham's suite, finishing his morning nap, I suppose."

Then she said lightly, casually, as if she hadn't been thinking seriously about it: "So you had the boy crowned?"

"I did. You want it for your Vasilije? Good! We want five million American dollars for our abdication. Grantham put in three to finance the doings, and he deserves a profit. He's been regularly elected by the Deputies. He's got no real backing here, but he can get support from the neighbors. Don't overlook that. There are a couple of countries not a million miles away that would gladly send in an army to support a legitimate king in exchange for whatever concessions they liked. But Lionel the First isn't unreasonable. He thinks it would be better for you to have a native ruler. All he asks is a decent provision from the government. Five million is low enough, and he'll abdicate tomorrow. Tell that to your Vasilije."

She went around me to avoid passing between my gun and its target, stood on tiptoe to kiss my ear, and said:

"You and your king are a couple of brigands. I'll be back in a few minutes." She went out.

"Ten millions," Colonel Einarson said.

"I can't trust you now," I said. "You'd pay us off in front of a firing squad."

"You can trust this pig Djudakovich?"

"He's got no reason to hate us."

"He will when he's told of you and his Romaine."

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I laughed.

"Besides, how can he be king? Ach! What is his promise to pay if he cannot become in a position to pay? Suppose even I am dead. What will he do with my army? Ach! You have seen the pig! What kind of king is he?"

"I don't know," I said truthfully.

The door opened and Vasilije Djudakovich came in, followed by the girl. I grinned at the fat Minister. He nodded without smiling.

The girl said:

"The government will give Lionel the First a draft for four million dollars, American, on either a Vienna or Athens bank, in exchange for his abdication." She dropped her official tone and added: "That's every nickel I could get out of him."

"You and your Vasilije are a couple of rotten bargain hunters," I complained. "But we'll take it. We've got to have a special train to Saloniki — one that will put us across the border before the abdication goes into effect."

"That will be arranged," she promised.

"Good! Now to do all this your Vasilije has got to take the army away from Einarson. Can he do it?"

"Ach!" Colonel Einarson reared up his head, swelled his thick chest. "That is precisely what he has got to do!"

The fat man grumbled sleepily through his yellow beard. Romaine came over and put a hand on my arm.

"Vasilije wants a private talk with Einarson. Leave it to him. We'll go upstairs."

I agreed and offered Djudakovich my automatic. He paid no attention to the gun or to me. He was looking with a clammy sort of patience at the officer. I went out with the girl and closed the door. At the foot of the stairs I took her by the shoulders and turned her around.

"Can I trust your Vasilije?" I asked.

"Oh my dear, he could handle half a dozen Einarsons."

"I don't mean that. He won't try to gyp me?"

She frowned at me, asking: "Why should you start worrying about that now?"

"He doesn't seem to be exactly all broken out with friendliness."

She laughed, and twisted her face around to bite at one of my hands on her shoulders.

"He's got ideals," she explained. "He despises you and your king for a pair of adventurers who are making a profit out of his country's troubles. That's why he's so sniffy. But he'll keep his word."

Maybe he would, I thought, but he hadn't given me his word — the girl had.

"I'm going over to see His Majesty," I said. "I won't be long — then I'll join you up in his suite. What was the idea of the sewing act? I had no buttons off."

"You did," she contradicted me, rummaging in my pocket for ciga-

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rettes. "I pulled one off when one of our men told me you and Einarson were headed this way. I thought it would look domestic."

I found my king in a wine and gold drawing-room in the Executive Residence, surrounded by Muravia's socially and politically ambitious. Uniforms were still in the majority, but a sprinkling of civilians had finally got to him, along with their wives and daughters. He was too occupied to see me for a few minutes, so I stood around, looking the folks over. Particularly one — a tall girl in black, who stood apart from the others, at a window.

I noticed her first because she was beautiful in face and body, and then I studied her more closely because of the expression in the brown eyes with which she watched the new king. If ever anybody looked proud of anybody else, this girl did of Grantham. Valeska Radnjak, I supposed.

I looked at the boy. His face was proud and flushed, and every two seconds turned toward the girl at the window while he listened to the jabbering of the worshipful group around him.

I pushed through the crowd toward him. He recognized me with the eyes of a park sleeper being awakened from sweet dreams by a night-stick on his shoe-soles. He excused himself to the others and took me down a corridor to a room with stained glass windows.

"This was Doctor Semich's office," he told me. "I shall ——" He broke off and looked away from me.

"You'll be in Greece by tomorrow," I said bluntly.

He frowned at his feet, a stubborn frown.

"You ought to know you can't hold on," I argued. "You may think everything is going smoothly. If you do, you're deaf, dumb, and blind. I put you in with the muzzle of a gun against Einarson's liver. I've kept you in this long by kidnaping him. I've made a deal with Djudakovich — the only strong man I've seen here. It's up to him to handle Einarson. I can't hold him any longer. Djudakovich will make a good king, if he wants to. He promises you four million dollars and a special train and safe-conduct to Saloniki. You go out with your head up. You've been a king. You've taken a country out of bad hands and put it into good — this fat guy is real. And you've made yourself a million profit."

Grantham looked at me and said:

"No. You go. I shall see it through. These people have trusted me, and I shall ——"

"My God, that's old Doc Semich's line! These people haven't trusted you — not a bit of it. I'm the people who trusted you. I made you king, understand? I made you king so you could go home with your chin up — not so you could stay here and make an ass of yourself! I bought help with promises. One of them was

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that you'd get out within twenty-four hours. You've got to keep the promises I made in your name. The people trusted you, huh? You were crammed down their throats, my son! And I did the cramming! Now I'm going to uncram you. If it happens to be tough on your romance — if your Valeska won't take any price less than this dinky country's throne — that's ——"

"That's enough." His voice came from some point at least fifty feet above me. "You shall have your abdication. I don't want the money. You will send word to me when the train is ready."

"Write the get-out now," I ordered.

He went over to the desk, found a sheet of paper, and with a steady hand wrote that in leaving Muravia he renounced his throne and all rights to it. He signed the paper *Lionel Rex* and gave it to me. I pocketed it and began sympathetically:

"I can understand your feelings, and I'm sorry that —"

He put his back to me and walked out of the room. I returned to the hotel.

At the fifth floor I left the elevator and walked softly to the door of my room. No sound came through. I tried the door, found it unlocked, and went in. Emptiness. Even my clothes and bags were gone. I went up to Grantham's suite.

Djudakovich, Romaine, Einarson, and half the police force were there.

Colonel Einarson sat very erect in an armchair in the middle of the room. Dark hair and mustache bristled. His chin was out, muscles bulged everywhere in his florid face, his eyes were hot — he was in one of his finest scrapping moods. That came of giving him an audience.

Romaine floated around and past the policemen who stood or sat everywhere in the room, and came to where I stood, just inside the door.

"Are your arrangements all made?" she asked.

"Got the abdication in my pocket."

"Give it to me."

"Not yet," I said. "First I've got to know that your Vasilije is as big as he looks. Einarson doesn't look squelched to me. Your fat boy ought to have known he'd blossom out in front of an audience."

"There's no telling what Vasilije is up to," she said lightly, "except that it will be adequate."

I wasn't as sure of that as she was. Djudakovich rumbled a question at her, and she gave him a quick answer. He rumbled some more — at the policemen. They began to go away from us, singly, in pairs, in groups. When the last one had gone the fat man pushed words out between his yellow whiskers at Einarson. Einarson stood up, chest out, shoulders back, grinning confidently under his flowing dark mustache.

"What now?" I asked the girl.

"Come along and you'll see," she

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said. Her breath came and went quickly, and the gray of her eyes was almost as dark as the black.

The four of us went downstairs and out the hotel's front door. The rain had stopped. In the plaza was gathered most of Stefania's population, thickest in front of the Administration Building and Executive Residence. Over their heads we could see the sheepskin caps of Einarson's regiment, still around those buildings as he had left them.

We — or at least Einarson — were recognized and cheered as we crossed the plaza. Einarson and Djudakovich went side by side in front, the soldier marching, the fat giant waddling. Romaine and I went close behind.

We arrived at the foot of the Administration Building's stone steps. Bayonets had an uncomfortably cold gleam in the early evening light as Einarson's troops presented arms. We climbed the steps. On the broad top step Einarson and Djudakovich turned to face soldiers and citizens below. The girl and I moved around behind the pair. Her teeth were chattering, her fingers were digging into my arm, but her lips and eyes were smiling recklessly.

The soldiers who were around the Executive Residence came to join those already before us, pushing back the citizens to make room. Another detachment came up. Einarson raised his hand, bawled a dozen words, growled at Djudakovich, and stepped back, giving the blond giant the center of the stage.

Djudakovich spoke, a drowsy, effortless roar that could have been heard as far as the hotel. As he spoke, he took a paper out of his pocket and held it before him.

The soldiers had broken ranks to crowd nearer, faces were reddening, a bayoneted gun was shaken aloft here and there.

Djudakovich talked on. The turmoil grew. A soldier pushed through his fellows and started up the steps, others at his heels. Angry voices raised cries.

Einarson cut in on the fat man's speech, stepping to the edge of the top step, bawling down at the upturned faces, with the voice of a man accustomed to being obeyed.

The soldiers on the steps tumbled down. Einarson bawled again. The broken ranks were slowly straightened, flourished guns were grounded. Einarson stood silent a moment, glowering at his troops, and then began an address. I couldn't understand his words any more than I had the fat man's, but there was no question about his impressiveness. And there was no doubt that the anger was going out of the faces below.

I looked at Romaine. She shivered and was no longer smiling. I looked at Djudakovich. He was as still and as emotionless as the mountain he resembled.

I wished I knew what it was all about, so I'd know whether it was wisest to shoot Einarson and duck through the apparently empty building behind us or not. I could guess

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that the paper in Djudakovich's hand had been evidence of some sort against the Colonel, evidence that would have stirred the soldiers to the point of attacking him if they hadn't been too accustomed to obeying him.

While I was wishing and guessing, Einarson finished his address, stepped to one side, clicked his heels together, pointed a finger at Djudakovich, barked an order.

Down below, soldiers' faces were indecisive, shifty-eyed, but four of them stepped briskly out at their colonel's order and came up the steps. "So," I thought, "my fat candidate has lost! Well, he can have the firing squad. The back door for mine." My hand had been holding the gun in my coat pocket for a long time. I kept it there while I took a slow step back, drawing the girl with me.

"Move when I tell you," I muttered.

"Wait!" she gasped. "Look!"

The fat giant, sleepy-eyed as ever, put out an enormous paw and caught the wrist of Einarson's pointing hand. Pulled Einarson down. Let go the wrist and caught the Colonel's shoulder. Lifted him off his feet with that one hand that held his shoulder. Shook him at the soldiers below. Shook Einarson at them with one hand. Shook his piece of paper — whatever it was — at them with the other. And I'm damned if one seemed any more strain on his monstrous arms than the other!

While he shook them — man and paper — he roared sleepily, and when he had finished roaring he flung his two handfuls down to the wild-eyed ranks. Flung them with a gesture that said, "*Here is the man and here is the evidence against him. Do what you like.*"

And the soldiers who had cringed back into ranks at Einarson's command when he stood tall and domineering above them, did what could have been expected when he was tossed down to them.

They tore him apart — actually — piece by piece. They dropped their guns and fought to get at him. Those farther away climbed over those nearer, smothering them, trampling them. They surged back and forth in front of the steps, an insane pack of men turned wolves, savagely struggling to destroy a man who must have died before he had been down half a minute.

I put the girl's hand off my arm and went to face Djudakovich.

"Muravia's yours," I said. "I don't want anything but our draft and train. Here's the abdication."

Romaine swiftly translated my words and then Djudakovich's:

"The train is ready now. The draft will be delivered there. Do you wish to go over for Grantham?"

"No. Send him down. How do I find the train?"

"I'll take you," she said. "We'll go through the building and out a side door."

One of Djudakovich's detectives

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sat at the wheel of a car in front of the hotel. Romaine and I got in it. Across the plaza tumult was still boiling. Neither of us said anything while the car whisked us through darkening streets. She sat as far from me as the width of the rear seat would let her.

Presently she asked very softly:

"And now you despise me?"

"No." I reached for her. "But I hate mobs, lynchings — they sicken me. No matter how wrong the man is, if a mob's against him, I'm for him. The only thing I ever pray to God for is a chance some day to squat down behind a machine gun with a lynching party in front of me. I had no use for Einarson, but I wouldn't have given him that! Well, what's done is done. What was the document?"

"A letter from Mahmoud. He had left it with a friend to be given to Vasilije if anything ever happened to him. He knew Einarson, it seems, and prepared his revenge. The letter confessed his — Mahmoud's — part in the assassination of General Radnjak, and said that Einarson was also implicated. The army worshiped Radnjak, and Einarson wanted the army."

"Your Vasilije could have used that to chase Einarson out — without feeding him to those wolves."

She shook her head and said:

"Vasilije was right. Bad as it was, that was the way to do it. It's over and settled forever, with Vasilije in power. An Einarson alive, an army not knowing he had killed their idol — too risky. Up to the end Einarson thought he had power enough to hold his troops, no matter what they knew. He ——"

"All right — it's done. And I'm glad to be through with this king business. Kiss me."

She did, and whispered:

"When Vasilije dies — and he can't live long, the way he eats — I'm coming to San Francisco."

"You're a cold-blooded hussy," I said.

Lionel Grantham, ex-king of Muravia, was only five minutes behind us in reaching our train. He wasn't alone. Valeska Radnjak, looking as much like the queen of something as if she had been, was with him. She didn't seem to be all broken up over the loss of her throne.

The boy was pleasant and polite enough to me during our rattling trip to Saloniki, but obviously not very comfortable in my company. His bride-to-be didn't know anybody but the boy existed, unless she happened to find someone else directly in front of her. So I didn't wait for their wedding, but left Saloniki on a boat that pulled out a couple of hours after we arrived.

I left the draft with them, of course. They decided to take out Lionel's three millions and return the fourth to Muravia. And I went back to San Francisco to quarrel with my boss over what he thought were unnecessary five- and ten-dollar items in my expense account.

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As we once wrote (in the last paragraph of the Introduction to O. Henry's COPS AND ROBBERS), *in nearly all O. Henry's stories you will find his literary trademark — the "snapper," the surprise ending. Now we bring you, as a double-entry with Dashiell Hammett's "This King Business," a little-known tale by O. Henry titled "Thimble, Thimble" — and you would expect this story, according to tradition, to have a surprise ending.*

But we have a surprise for you.

Not only does "Thimble, Thimble" not have a surprise ending, it has no ending at all!

In a way, that is the ultimate twist, the final surprise. So perhaps "Thimble, Thimble" is, by reverse English, even more in the O. Henry tradition than any other story by the Old Master that we could have paired with the New Master's.

"Thimble, Thimble" is a riddle, pure and simple. No, we take half of that statement back: "Thimble, Thimble" is pure riddle — but it is not simple. While the plot is as far removed from Frank R. Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" as it is possible to conceive, O. Henry must have been inspired by the Stockton classic — he confesses in the light-hearted beginning of "Thimble, Thimble" that he has "borrowed from the late Mr. Frank Stockton." You can dismiss that acknowledgment as the courteous bow of a true Southern gentleman — the O. Henry riddle stands superbly on its own feet. Indeed, one of EQMM's readers, Lionel B. Moses of Chicago, considers the O. Henry riddle "the best of them all." According to Mr. Moses, the story first appeared in "Hampton's" magazine, which ran a contest for its readers to elicit the most satisfying answer to the riddle, and O. Henry himself acted as the judge.

We make no promises, but who do you think is the rightful owner of the ancient timepiece — Black-Tie or Blue-Tie?

THIMBLE, THIMBLE

by O. HENRY

THESE are the directions for finding the office of Carteret & Carteret, Mill Supplies and Leather Belting:

You follow the Broadway trail down until you pass the Crosstown Line, the Bread Line, and the Dead Line, and come to the Big Cañons of the Moneygrubber Tribe. Then you turn to the left, to the right, dodge a push-cart and the tongue of a two-ton four-horse dray, and hop,

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skip, and jump to a granite ledge on the side of a twenty-one-story synthetic mountain of stone and iron. In the twelfth story is the office of Carteret & Carteret. The factory where they make the mill supplies and leather belting is in Brooklyn. Those commodities — to say nothing of Brooklyn — not being of interest to you, let us hold the incidents within the confines of a one-act, one-scene play, thereby lessening the toil of the reader and the expenditure of the publisher. So, if you have the courage to face ten pages of type and Carteret & Carteret's office boy, Percival, you shall sit on a varnished chair in the inner office and peep at the little comedy of the Old Negro, the Hunting-Case Watch, and the Open-Faced Question — mostly borrowed from the late Mr. Frank Stockton, as you will conclude.

First, biography (but pared to the quick) must intervene. I am for the inverted sugar-coated quinine pill — the bitter on the outside.

The Carterets were, or was (Columbia College professors please rule), an old Virginia family. Long time ago the gentlemen of the family had worn lace ruffles and carried tinless foils and owned plantations and had slaves galore.

But the war had greatly reduced their holdings.

In digging up the Carteret history I shall not take you further back than the year 1620. The two original American Carterets came over in that year, but by different means of transportation. One brother, named John, came in the *Mayflower* and became a Pilgrim Father. You've seen his pictures on the covers of the Thanksgiving magazines, hunting turkeys in the deep snow with a blunderbuss. Blandford Carteret, the other brother, crossed the pond in his own brigantine, landed on the Virginia coast, and became an F. F. V. John became distinguished for piety and shrewdness in business; Blandford for his pride, juleps, marksmanship, and vast slave-cultivated plantations.

Then came the Civil War. (I must condense this historical interpolation.) Stonewall Jackson was shot; Lee surrendered; Grant toured the world; cotton went to nine cents; Old Crow whiskey and Jim Crow cars were invented; the Seventy-ninth Massachusetts Volunteers returned to the Ninety-seventh Alabama Zouaves the battle flag of Lundy's Lane which they bought at a second-hand store in Chelsea, kept by a man named Skzchnzski; Georgia sent the President a sixty-pound watermelon — and that brings us up to the time when the story begins. My! but that was sparring for an opening! I really must brush up on my Aristotle.

The Yankee Carterets went into business in New York long before the war. Their house, as far as Leather Belting and Mill Supplies was concerned, was as musty and arrogant and solid as one of those old East India tea-importing concerns that you read about in Dickens. There were some rumors of a war behind its coun-

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ters, but not enough to affect the business.

During and after the war, Blandford Carteret, F. F. V., lost his plantations, juleps, marksmanship, and life. He bequeathed little more than his pride to his surviving family. So it came to pass that Blandford Carteret, the Fifth, aged fifteen, was invited by the leather-and-mill-supplies branch of that name to come North and learn business instead of hunting foxes and boasting of the glory of his fathers on the reduced acres of his impoverished family. The boy jumped at the chance; and at the age of twenty-five sat in the office of the firm equal partner with John, the Fifth, of the blunderbuss-and-turkey branch. Here the story begins again.

The young men were about the same age, smooth of face, alert, easy of manner, and with an air that promised mental and physical quickness. They were razored, blue-serged, straw-hatted, and pearl stick-pinned like other young New Yorkers who might be millionaires or bill clerks.

One afternoon at four o'clock, in the private office of the firm, Blandford Carteret opened a letter that a clerk had just brought to his desk. After reading it, he chuckled audibly for nearly a minute. John looked around from his desk inquiringly.

"It's from mother," said Blandford. "I'll read you the funny part of it. She tells me all the neighborhood news first, of course, and then cautions me against getting my feet wet and musical comedies. After that come vital statistics about calves and pigs and an estimate of the wheat crop. And now I'll quote some:

" 'And what do you think! Old Uncle Jake, who was seventy-six last Wednesday, must go traveling. Nothing would do but he must go to New York and see his "young Marster Blandford." Old as he is, he has a deal of common sense, so I've let him go. I couldn't refuse him — he seemed to have concentrated all his hopes and desires into this one adventure into the wide world. You know he was born on the plantation, and has never been ten miles away from it in his life. And he was your father's body servant during the war, and has been always a faithful vassal and servant of the family. He has often seen the gold watch — the watch that was your father's and your father's father's. I told him it was to be yours, and he begged me to allow him to take it to you and to put it into your hands himself.

" 'So he has it, carefully enclosed in a buckskin case, and is bringing it to you with all the pride and importance of a king's messenger. I gave him money for the round trip and for a two weeks' stay in the city. I wish you would see to it that he gets comfortable quarters — Jake won't need much looking after — he's able to take care of himself.

" 'I gave him full directions about finding you, and packed his valise myself. Take the watch that he brings you — it's almost a decoration. It has been worn by true Carterets, and there

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isn't a stain upon it nor a false movement of the wheels. Bringing it to you is the crowning joy of Old Jake's life. I wanted him to have that little outing and that happiness before it is too late. You have often heard us talk about how Jake, pretty badly wounded himself, crawled through the reddened grass at Chancellorsville to where your father lay with the bullet in his dear heart, and took the watch from his pocket to keep it from the "Yanks."

" 'So, my son, when the old man comes, consider him as a frail but worthy messenger from the oldtime life and home.

" 'You have been so long away from home and so long among the people that we have always regarded as aliens that I'm not sure that Jake will know you when he sees you. But Jake has a keen perception, and I rather believe that he will know a Virginia Carteret at sight. I can't conceive that even ten years in Yankeeland could change a boy of mine. Anyhow, I'm sure you will know Jake. I put eighteen collars in his valise. If he should have to buy others, he wears a number 15½. Please see that he gets the right ones. He will be no trouble to you at all.

" 'If you are not too busy, I'd like for you to find him a place to board where they have white-meal cornbread, and try to keep him from taking his shoes off in your office or on the street. His right foot swells a little, and he likes to be comfortable.

" 'If you can spare the time, count his handkerchiefs when they come back from the wash. I bought him a dozen new ones before he left. He should be there about the time this letter reaches you. I told him to go straight to your office when he arrives.' "

As soon as Blandford had finished the reading of this, something happened (as there should happen in stories and must happen on the stage).

Percival, the office boy, with his air of despising the world's output of mill supplies and leather belting, came in to announce that a colored gentleman was outside to see Mr. Blandford Carteret.

"Bring him in," said Blandford, rising.

John Carteret swung around in his chair and said to Percival: "Ask him to wait a few minutes outside. We'll let you know when to bring him in."

Then he turned to his cousin with one of those broad, slow smiles that was an inheritance of all the Carterets, and said:

"Bland, I've always had a consuming curiosity to understand the differences that you haughty Southerners believe to exist between 'you all' and the people of the North. Of course, I know that you consider yourselves made out of finer clay and look upon Adam as only a collateral branch of your ancestry; but I don't know why. I never could understand the differences between us."

"Well, John," said Blandford, laughing, "what you don't understand about it is just the difference, of course. I suppose it was the feudal

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way in which we lived that gave us our lordly baronial airs and feeling of superiority."

"But you are not feudal now," went on John. "Since we licked you and stole your cotton and mules you've had to go to work just as we 'damnyankees,' as you call us, have always been doing. And you're just as proud and exclusive and upper-classy as you were before the war. So it wasn't your money that caused it."

"Maybe it was the climate," said Blandford lightly, "or maybe our Negroes spoiled us. I'll call old Jake in, now. I'll be glad to see the old villain again."

"Wait just a moment," said John. "I've got a little theory I want to test. You and I are pretty much alike in our general appearance. Old Jake hasn't seen you since you were fifteen. Let's have him in and play fair and see which of us gets the watch. The old fellow surely ought to be able to pick out his 'young marster' without any trouble. The alleged aristocrat superiority of a 'reb' ought to be visible to him at once. He couldn't make the mistake of handing over the timepiece to a Yankee, of course. The loser buys the dinner this evening and two dozen 15½ collars for Jake. Is it a go?"

Blandford agreed heartily. Percival was summoned, and told to usher the "colored gentleman" in.

Uncle Jake stepped inside the private office cautiously. He was a little old man, as black as soot, wrinkled and bald except for a fringe of white wool, cut decorously short, that ran over his ears and around his head. There was nothing of the stage "uncle" about him; his black suit nearly fitted him; his shoes shone, and his straw hat was banded with a gaudy ribbon. In his right hand he carried something carefully concealed by his closed fingers.

Uncle Jake stopped a few steps from the door. Two young men sat in their revolving desk-chairs ten feet apart and looked at him in friendly silence. His gaze slowly shifted many times from one to the other. He felt sure that he was in the presence of one, at least, of the revered family among whose fortunes his life had begun and was to end.

One had the pleasing but haughty Carteret air; the other had the unmistakable straight, long family nose. Both had the keen black eyes, horizontal brows, and thin, smiling lips that had distinguished both the Carteret of the *Mayflower* and him of the brigantine. Old Jake had thought that he could have picked out his young master instantly from a thousand Northerners; but he found himself in difficulties. The best he could do was to use strategy.

"Howdy, Marse Blandford — howdy, suh?" he said, looking midway between the young men.

"Howdy, Uncle Jake?" they both answered pleasantly and in unison. "Sit down. Have you brought the watch?"

Uncle Jake chose a hard-bottom chair at a respectful distance, sat on the edge of it, and laid his hat care-

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fully on the floor. The watch in its buckskin case he gripped tightly. He had not risked his life on the battlefield to rescue that watch from his "old marster's" foes to hand it over again to the enemy without a struggle.

"Yes, suh; I got it in my hand, suh. I'm gwine give it to you right away in jus' a minute. Old Missus told me to put it in young Marse Blandford's hand and tell him to wear it for the family pride and honor. It was a mighty lonesome trip for an old man to make — ten thousand miles, it must be, back to old Vi'ginia, suh. You've growed mightily, young marster. I wouldn't have reconnized you but for yo' powerful resemblance to the old marster.

With admirable diplomacy the old man kept his eyes roaming in the space between the two men. His words might have been addressed to either. Though neither wicked nor perverse, he was seeking for a sign. Blandford and John exchanged winks.

"I reckon you done got you ma's letter," went on Uncle Jake. "She said she was gwine to write to you about my comin' along up this er-way."

"Yes, yes, Uncle Jake," said John, briskly. "My cousin and I have just been notified to expect you. We are both Carterets, you know."

"Although one of us," said Blandford, "was born and raised in the North."

"So if you will hand over the watch ——" said John.

"My cousin and I ——" said Blandford.

"We'll see to it ——" said John.

"That comfortable quarters are found for you," said Blandford.

With creditable ingenuity, old Jake set up a cackling, high-pitched, protracted laugh. He beat his knee, picked up his hat and bent the brim in an apparent paroxysm of humorous appreciation. The seizure afforded him a mask behind which he could roll his eye impartially between, above, and beyond his two tormentors.

"I sees what!" he chuckled, after a while. "You gen'lemen is tryin' to have fun with the po' old man. But you can't fool old Jake. I knowed you, Marse Blandford, the minute I sot eyes on you. You was a po' skimpy little boy no mo' than about fo'teen when you lef' home to come No'th; but I knowed you the minute I sot eyes on you. You is the mawtal image of old marster. The other gen'leman resembles you mightily, suh; but you can't fool old Jake on a member of the old Vi'ginia family. No, suh."

At exactly the same time both Carterets smiled and extended a hand for the watch.

Uncle Jake's wrinkled black face lost the expression of amusement into which he had vainly twisted it. He knew that he was being teased, and that it made little real difference, as far as its safety went, into which of those outstretched hands he placed the family treasure. But it seemed to him that not only his own pride and loyalty but much of the Virginia Carterets' was at stake. He had heard down South during the war about that

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other branch of the family that lived in the North and fought on "the yuther side," and it had always grieved him. He had followed his "old marster's" fortunes from stately luxury through war to almost poverty. And now, with the last relic and reminder of him, blessed by "old missus," and entrusted implicitly to his care, he had come ten thousand miles (as it seemed) to deliver it into the hands of the one who was to wear it and wind it and cherish it and listen to it tick off the unsullied hours that marked the lives of the Carterets — of Virginia.

His experience and conception of the Yankees had been an impression of tyrants — "low-down, common trash" — in blue, laying waste with fire and sword. He had seen the smoke of many burning homesteads almost as grand as Carteret Hall ascending to the drowsy Southern skies. And now he was face to face with one of them — and he could not distinguish him from his "young marster" whom he had come to find and bestow upon him the emblem of his kingship — even as the arm "clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful" laid Excalibur in the right hand of Arthur. He saw before him two young men, easy, kind, courteous, welcoming, either of whom might have been the one he sought. Troubled, bewildered, sorely grieved at his weakness of judgment, old Jake abandoned his loyal subterfuges. His right hand sweated against the buckskin cover of the watch. He was deeply humiliated and chastened.

Seriously, now, his prominent, yellow-white eyes closely scanned the two young men. At the end of his scrutiny he was conscious of but one difference between them. One wore a narrow black tie with a white-pearl stickpin. The other's "four-in-hand" was a narrow blue one pinned with a black pearl.

And then, to old Jake's relief, there came a sudden distraction. Drama knocked at the door with imperious knuckles, and forced Comedy to the wings, and Drama peeped with a smiling but set face over the footlights.

Percival, the hater of mill supplies, brought in a card, which he handed, with the manner of one bearing a cartel, to Blue-Tie.

"Olivia De Ormond," read Blue-Tie from the card. He looked inquiringly at his cousin.

"Why not have her in," said Black-Tie, "and bring matters to a conclusion?"

"Uncle Jake," said one of the young men, "would you mind taking that chair over there in the corner for a while? A lady is coming in — on some business."

The lady whom Percival ushered in was young and petulantly, decidedly, freshly, consciously, and intentionally pretty. She was dressed with such expensive plainness that she made you consider lace and ruffles as mere tatters and rags. But one great ostrich plume that she wore would have marked her anywhere in the army of beauty as the wearer of the merry helmet of Navarre.

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Miss De Ormond accepted the swivel chair at Blue-Tie's desk. Then the gentlemen drew leather-upholstered seats conveniently near, and spoke of the weather.

"Yes," said she, "I noticed it was warmer. But I mustn't take up too much of your time during business hours. That is," she continued, "unless we talk business."

She addressed her words to Blue-Tie with a charming smile.

"Very well," said he. "You don't mind my cousin being present, do you? We are generally rather confidential with each other — especially in business matters."

"Oh, no," caroled Miss De Ormond. "I'd rather he did hear. He knows all about it, anyhow. In fact, he's quite a material witness because he was present when you — when it happened. I thought you might want to talk things over before — well, before any action is taken, as I believe the lawyers say."

"Have you anything in the way of a proposition to make?" asked Black-Tie.

Miss De Ormond looked reflectively at the neat toe of one of her dull-kid pumps.

"I had a proposal made to me," she said. "If the proposal sticks, it cuts out the proposition. Let's have that settled first."

"Well, as far as ——" began Blue-Tie.

"Excuse me, cousin," interrupted Black-Tie, "if you don't mind my cutting in." And then he turned, with a good-natured air toward the lady.

"Now, let's recapitulate a bit," he said, cheerfully. "All three of us, besides other mutual acquaintances, have been out on a good many larks together."

"I'm afraid I'll have to call the birds by another name," said Miss De Ormond.

"All right," responded Black-Tie, with unimpaired cheerfulness; "suppose we say 'squabs' when we talk about the 'proposal' and 'larks' when we discuss the 'proposition.' You have a quick mind, Miss De Ormond. Two months ago some half-dozen of us went in a motor-car for a day's run into the country. We stopped at a road-house for dinner. My cousin proposed marriage to you then and there. He was influenced to do so, of course, by the beauty and charm which no one can deny that you possess."

"I wish I had you for a press agent, Mr. Carteret," said the beauty, with a dazzling smile.

"You are on the stage, Miss De Ormond," went on Black-Tie. "You have had, doubtless, many admirers, and perhaps other proposals. You must remember, too, that we were a party of merrymakers on that occasion. There were a good many corks pulled. That the proposal of marriage was made to you by my cousin we cannot deny. But hasn't it been your experience that, by common consent, such things lose their seriousness when viewed in the next day's sunlight? Isn't there something of a 'code'

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among good 'sports' — I use the word in its best sense — that wipes out each day the follies of the evening previous?"

"Oh, yes," said Miss De Ormond. "I know that very well. And I've always played up to it. But as you seem to be conducting the case — with the silent consent of the defendant — I'll tell you something more. I've got letters from him repeating the proposal. And they're signed too."

"I understand," said Black-Tie, gravely. "What's your price for the letters?"

"I'm not a cheap one," said Miss De Ormond. "But I had decided to make you a rate. You both belong to a swell family. Well, if I *am* on the stage nobody can say a word against me truthfully. And the money is only a secondary consideration. It isn't the money I was after. I — I believed him — and — and I liked him."

She cast a soft, entrancing glance at Blue-Tie from under her long eyelashes.

"And the price?" went on Black-Tie, inexorably.

"Ten thousand dollars," said the lady, sweetly.

"Or ——"

"Or the fulfilment of the engagement to marry."

"I think it is time," interrupted Blue-Tie, "for me to be allowed to say a word or two. You and I, cousin, belong to a family that has held its head pretty high. You have been brought up in a section of the country very different from the one where our branch of the family lived. Yet both of us are Carterets, even if some of our ways and theories differ. You remember, it is a tradition of the family, that no Carteret ever failed in chivalry to a lady or failed to keep his word when it was given."

Then Blue-Tie, with frank decision showing on his countenance, turned to Miss De Ormond.

"Olivia," said he, "on what date will you marry me?"

Before she could answer, Black-Tie again interposed.

"It is a long journey," said he, "from Plymouth Rock to Norfolk Bay. Between the two points we find the changes that nearly three centuries have brought. In that time the old order has changed. We no longer burn witches or torture slaves. And today we neither spread our cloaks on the mud for ladies to walk over nor treat them to the ducking-stool. It is the age of common sense, adjustment, and proportion. All of us — ladies, gentlemen, women, men, Northerners, Southerners, lords, caitiffs, actors, hardware-drummers, Senators, hod-carriers and politicians — are coming to a better understanding. Chivalry is one of our words that changes its meaning every day. Family pride is a thing of many constructions — it may show itself by maintaining a moth-eaten arrogance in a cob-webbed Colonial mansion or by the prompt paying of one's debts.

"Now, I suppose you've had enough of my monologue. I've learned something of business and a little of life;

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and I somehow believe, cousin, that our great-great-grandfathers, the original Carterets, would endorse my view of this matter."

Black-Tie wheeled around to his desk, wrote in a checkbook and tore out the check, the sharp rasp of the perforated leaf making the only sound in the room. He laid the check within easy reach of Miss De Ormond's hand.

"Business is business," said he. "We live in a business age. There is my personal check for $10,000. What do you say, Miss De Ormond — will it be orange blossoms or cash?"

Miss De Ormond picked up the check carelessly, folded it indifferently, and stuffed it down into her glove.

"Oh, this'll do," she said, calmly. "I just thought I'd call and put it up to you. I guess you people are all right. But a girl has feelings, you know. I've heard one of you was a Southerner — I wonder which one of you it is?"

She arose, smiled sweetly, and walked to the door. There, with a flash of white teeth and a dip of the heavy plume, she disappeared.

Both of the cousins had forgotten Uncle Jake for the time. But now they heard the shuffling of his shoes as he came across the rug toward them from his seat in the corner.

"Young marster," he said, "take yo' watch."

And without hesitation he laid the ancient timepiece in the hand of its *rightful* owner.

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The name of Edgar Saltus — a curiously appealing combination of syllables — rarely appears in the literary journals of today. Once upon a time — at the turn of the century — Edgar Saltus won a modest position in letters for his "mystic paganism and jeweled workmanship." Had his work projected a deeper meaning, as well as more substance and power, his reputation would have grown with the years — for it is true that Edgar Saltus deliberately rebelled against the conventional literary standards of his own period. But now the name, the writings, and the man are little more than a memory: Edgar Saltus is a member of that ever-increasing fraternity, The Fellows of Fading Fame.

It is odd to recall that Edgar Saltus's history of the Roman emperors — IMPERIAL PURPLE *— ranked as President Harding's favorite book, and that Saltus's highly colored style was said to have influenced the manner in which President Harding wrote his speeches and state documents.*

Edgar Saltus believed in the maxim — "It is the shudder that tells." Yet we have not chosen one of Saltus's shuddery tales of murder and passion. Rather, "The Grand Duke's Rubies" is an almost humorous story, although critics have consistently maintained that Saltus was lacking in humor, though not in sly wit. You will meet the Saltus character who appears most frequently in his novels — as frequently as Eugène de Rastignac pops up in Balzac's COMÉDIE HUMAINE. *His name is Alphabet Jones, and while he is neither the great-grandfather of Rex Stout's Alphabet Hicks nor the grandfather of Samuel Hopkins Adams's Average Jones, he nevertheless has a New-Arabian-Nights charm and flavor which he owes to no one. And surely his part in the Adventure of the Duke's Rubies is at least amusing in these days of lean and hard-muscled prose.*

The plot of the Duke's Rubies was based on a real-life occurrence. The same coup, with variations, dates far back in the history of crime. Other writers have found the central idea to their liking — Melville Davisson Post, for one — but we believe Edgar Saltus's tale to be the first fictional use of one of crookdom's simplest yet cleverest tricks-of-the-trade.

THE GRAND DUKE'S RUBIES

by EDGAR SALTUS

THERE is in New York a club called the Balmoral, which has two peculiarities — no one ever goes there much before midnight, and it is the only place in town where you can get anything fit to eat at four o'clock in the morning. The members are politicians of the higher grade, men

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about town, and a sprinkle of nondescripts. In the unhallowed inspiration of a moment, Alphabet Jones, the novelist — in polite society Mr. A. B. Fenwick Chisholm-Jones — baptized it the Smallpox, a name which has stuck tenaciously, the before-mentioned members being usually pitted — against each other. Of the many rooms of the club, one, it should be explained, is the most enticing. It is situated on an upper floor, and the siren that presides therein is a long table dressed in green.

Her name is Baccarat.

One night last February, Alphabet Jones rattled up to the door in a vagabond hansom. He was thirsty, impecunious, and a trifle tired. He had been to a cotillon, where he had partaken of champagne, and he wanted to get the taste of it out of his throat. He needed five hundred dollars, and in his card-case there were only two hundred and fifty. The bar of the Athenaeum Club he knew at that hour was closed, possible money-lenders were in bed, and it was with the idea of killing the two birds of the legend that he sought the Balmoral.

He encountered there no difficulty in slaking his thirst; and when, in one draught, which brought to his tonsils a suggestion of art, science, and Wagner combined, he swallowed a brandy-and-soda, he felt better, and looked about to see who might be present. The room which he had entered was on what is called the parlor floor. It was long, high-ceiled, comfortably furnished, and somewhat dim. At the furthermost end three men were seated, two of whom he recognized, the one as Sumpter Leigh, the other as Colonel Barker; but the third he did not remember having seen before. Some Westerner, he thought; for Jones prided himself on knowing everyone worth knowing in New York and, it may be added, in several other cities as well.

He took out his card-case and thumbed the roll of bills reflectively. If he went upstairs, he told himself, he might double the amount in two minutes. But then, again, he might lose it.

Yet, if he did, might not five hundred be as easily borrowed as two hundred and fifty?

"It's brutal to be so hard up," he mused. "Literature doesn't pay. I might better set up as publisher, open a drug-shop, turn grocer, do anything, in fact, which is brainless and remunerative, than attempt to earn a living by the sweat of my pen. There's that *Interstate Magazine:* the editor sent me a note by a messenger this morning, asking for a story, adding that the messenger would wait *while I wrote it.* Evidently he thinks me three parts stenographer and the rest kaleidoscope. What is a good synonym for an editor, anyway?"

And as Jones asked himself this question he glared fiercely in a mirror that extended from cornice to floor. Then, mollified, possibly, by his own appearance, for he was a handsome

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man, tall, fair, and clear of skin, he threw himself on a sofa, and fell to thinking about the incidents of the ball.

For some time past he had been as discreetly attentive as circumstances permitted to a young girl, the only child of a potent financier, and on that particular evening he had sat out the cotillon with her at an assembly. She was very pretty and, unusual as it may seem in a débutante, rather coy. But when, a half-hour before, he had wished her sweet dreams in that seductive manner for which he was famous, she had allowed the tips of her fingers to rest in his own just one fleeting second longer than was necessary and, what is more to the point, had gazed at him with something which now, under the influence of the brandy-and-soda, seemed almost a promise. "Dear little soul!" he muttered; "if she marries me I will refuse her nothing. It will be the devil's own job, though, to get her any sort of an engagement ring. Tiffany, perhaps, might give me one on credit, but it will have to be something very handsome, something new; not that tiresome solitaire. Those stones I saw the other day —H'm! I wonder what that fellow is staring at me for?"

He lounged forward to where the men were seated, and being asked to draw a chair, graciously accepted the invitation and another brandy-and-soda as well.

"It was this way," the stranger exclaimed, excitedly, when he and Jones had been introduced. "I was telling these gentlemen when you came in that you looked like the Grand Duke Sergius ———"

"Thank you," the novelist answered, affably. "The same to you."

"I never saw him though," the stranger continued.

"No more have I."

"Only his picture."

"Your remark, then, was doubly flattering."

"But the picture to which I allude was that of a chimerical grand duke."

"Really, sir, really you are overwhelming."

"But wait a minute, do wait a minute. Mr. Jones, I don't know whether you caught my name: it is Fairbanks — David Fairbanks."

"Delighted! I remember it perfectly. My old friend, Nicholas Manhattan, bought a ruby of you once, and a beauty it was. I heard at the time that you made a specialty of them."

"So did the grand duke. He came here, you know, on that man-of-war."

"Yes, I know. Mrs. Wainwaring gave him a reception. It was just my luck: I was down with the measles at the time."

"Oh, you were, were you? You were down with the measles, eh? Well, I wish I had been. Gentlemen, listen to this; you must listen. I was in my office in Maiden Lane one day, when a young man came in. He wore the most magnificent fur coat I have ever seen in my life. No, that coat was something that only Russia

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could have produced. He handed me a card on which was engraved:

P^CE MICHEL ZAROGUINE,
Aide-de-camp de S. A. I. le grand-duc Serge de Russie.

And then, of all things in the world, he offered me a pinch of snuff, and when I refused he helped himself out of a beautiful box and flicked the grains which had fallen on his lapel with a nimbleness of finger such as it was a pleasure to behold. I ought to tell you that he spoke English with great precision, though his accent was not pleasant — sort of grizzled, as it were. Well, gentlemen, he said that *his* prince, as he called him, the grand duke, wanted some rubies; they were intended for a present; and though my visitor did not imply anything either by word or gesture, I suspected at once that they were for a lady. The grand duke at that time had been here a fortnight, and it was said — However, there is no use in going into that. So I showed him a few; but if you will believe me, he wanted enough to make a tiara. I told him that a tiara of stones of that quality would come anywhere from sixty to eighty thousand dollars. If I had said a peck of groats, he could not have appeared more indifferent. 'It is a great deal of money,' I said. He smiled a little at that, as though he were thinking, 'Poor devil of an American, it may seem a great deal of money to you, but to a grand duke — !' Then I brought out all I had. He looked them over with the pincers very carefully, and asked how much I valued them at. I told him a hundred and ten thousand dollars. He didn't turn a hair."

"Was he bald?" Jones asked.

"No, sir, he was not; and your jest is ill-timed. Gentlemen, I appeal to you. I insist on Mr. Jones's attention —"

"Why, the man is crazy," Jones mused. "What does he mean by saying that my jest is ill-timed? But why does he insist on my attention? He's drunk — that's what he is; he's drunk and quarrelsome. Well, let him be. What do I care?" And Alphabet Jones looked complacently at his white waistcoat and then over at his excitable *vis-à-vis*. Mr. Fairbanks was a little man of the Cruikshank pattern, very red and rotund, and as he talked he gesticulated.

"So I said to him, 'There's been a corner in rubies, but it broke, and that is the reason why I can give them at that price.' He didn't know what a corner was, and when I explained he took a notebook out of his pocket and wrote something in it. 'I am making a collection of Americanisms for the Czarina,' he said."

Jones had begun to muse again. "That fat little brute is a type," he told himself. "I must work him in somewhere. I wonder, though, if I had not better leave him and go up to the baccarat. It might be more remunerative. It would be amusing," and Alphabet smiled at the fantasy of his own thought, "it would be amusing indeed if he tried to prevent me."

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He put his hand over his eyes and let Mr. Fairbanks ramble on.

"You see," he heard him say, in connection with something that had gone before, "a man in my business has to be careful. Now, there are rubies and rubies. I only handle the Oriental stones, which are a variety of the hyaline corindus. They are found in Ceylon, in Tibet, and in Burma among the crumblings of primordial rock. But I have seen beauties that were picked from wastelands in China from which the granite had presumably disappeared. They are the most brilliant and largest of all. There is another kind, which looks like a burned topaz: it is found in Brazil and Massachusetts. Then there is the Bohemian ruby, which is nothing but quartz reddened by the action of manganese; and there are also imitations so well-made that only an expert can tell them from the real. I keep a few of the latter on hand so as to be able to gauge a customer. Well, gentlemen, the Russian picked up two of them, which I placed before him, and put them to one side. He knew the false article at a glance. Your friend, Jones, that simpleton Nicholas Manhattan, would have taken one of the imitation if I had not prevented him, but this fellow was so clever about it that he won my immediate respect."

"Jones, indeed!" Alphabet muttered. "Why, the brute is as familiar as a haberdasher's advertisement!" He looked at him again: his face was like a brandied peach that had fallen into the fire, and his head was set on his shoulders like an obus on a cannon. "Bah!" he continued, "what is the use in being irritated at a beggar who is as ugly as a high hat at the seashore?" — "When you do me the honor to address me, sir," he said, aloud, "I shall be obliged if you will call me *Mr.* Jones."

"Tut, tut!" the little man answered, and then, without further attention to Alphabet, he continued his tale:

"When the Russian had examined the rubies very carefully a second time, he said, half to me and half to himself, 'I think they will do.' Then, looking up at me, he added, 'Mr. Fairbanks, you do not make a hundred-thousand-dollar sale every day, do you?' 'No, your Excellency,' I answered — you see, I made a dash at Excellency; Prince seemed sort of abrupt, don't you think? — 'No, your Excellency, it does not happen over once a week.' He smiled at that, and well he might, for the biggest sale I had previously made amounted to but nine thousand dollars. 'Mr. Fairbanks,' he continued, 'the grand duke is rich, as you well know. I am not. You will understand me the better when I tell you that at present, unless cholera has visited Russia since I left, there are exactly twenty-nine people in Petersburg who bear the same name and title as myself. Now, if the grand duke purchases these rubies, what will my commission be?' 'That is squarely put, your Excellency,' I answered —

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'squarely put. Will his Imperial Highness pay cash for the rubies?' "

"You might have asked him if his Imperial Highness would pay *rubis sur l'ongle*. But I remember you don't approve of wit."

This interjection came, of course, from Jones. Mr. Fairbanks, however, let it pass unnoticed. It may be that he did not understand.

" 'Necessarily,' he replied. 'A recent ukase of the Czar's inhibits any member of the Imperial family from purchasing so much as a brass samovar on credit.' I bowed. 'A very proper and wise ukase that is, your Excellency. Under such circumstances I think I see my way to giving you one per cent.' He laughed at that, as though I had made a remark of great brilliance."

"I like that," Jones exclaimed, in spite of himself. "Why, you wouldn't be brilliant in a calcium light."

But this remark, like the former, passed unheeded. For the first time since his memory ran not to the contrary it seemed to Jones that he was being ignored; and to ignore Jones! *Allons donc!*

" 'Look at me,' said the Russian," Mr. Fairbanks continued. " 'The grand duke will not buy these rubies except on my recommendation, and I value that recommendation at not a kopeck less than ten thousand dollars. It is to take or to leave. Choose, sir, choose.' And with that he picked up his hat. 'I cannot, your Excellency, I cannot.' He turned away and made for the door. 'Excellency,' I cried, 'I will give you five.' He wheeled about. 'If,' he said, 'you offer one per cent when you can give five and three-fifths, you are just as well able to give nine and two-thirds.' "

"He was a lightning calculator, wasn't he?"

" 'On my conscience,' I answered, 'I cannot give more than seven.' 'Ah!' he replied, 'I do not know how to haggle.' He reflected a moment. 'It is well,' he said; 'I accept.' Gentlemen, when he said that, I felt that I had done a good day's work. Apart from the commission I had a clean profit of eighteen thousand dollars; and eighteen thousand dollars is a tidy sum — not to you, gentlemen, nor to Jones there, but to me."

"Gad, the little cad is getting sarcastic." And Jones laughed quietly to himself and finished his brandy-and-soda.

Mr. Fairbanks waved his arms and pounded the table so excitedly that he roused a waiter from a nap.

"Yes, bring the same," he cried. "Now, gentlemen, I am coming to the point. I insist on your attention. *Mr.* Jones, I will thank *you* not to interrupt — unless it happens that you care to aid me with the details. Yes, sir, I said details, — d-e-t-a-i-l-s. Now wait a minute, will you? Gentlemen, I appeal to you. He shall wait. Beat it into his head — can't you? — that I am coming to the point, and very interesting, I promise, you will all find it to be."

"*Tu te vantes, mon bonhomme, tu te vantes.* Here's to you."

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"Here's to you. Well, gentlemen, it was then one o'clock. I always lunch at that hour, and I asked the Russian if he would let me offer him a bite. 'I might take some tea and a bit of toast,' he said. 'That,' I replied, 'would be tasty with a little caviare.' I wanted to show him that, though a dealer in precious stones, I was first and foremost a man of the world."

Alphabet Jones rolled over in spasms of delight. "Divinities of Pindar," he shouted, "listen to that!"

"Gentlemen, gag that man — gag him: I will be listened to. There, now, *will* you be quiet? You make me lose the thread. Where was I? Oh, yes: the Russian seemed to reflect a moment, and looked at his watch. 'I think,' he said, 'it would be better to go straight to the Brevoort House.' (The grand duke, I knew, was stopping there.) 'My prince is to go out this afternoon between two and three, and if you do not see him today it may be hard to manage it tomorrow.' I am at your orders, Excellency,' I answered; 'business before pleasure.' 'Good, then,' he returned; 'we will take a droschky, or, better even, your railway that is in the air.' 'The elevated, you mean,' I said, 'the elevated. Yes, of course.' Inwardly I was well pleased that the suggestion should have come from him, for I am not overfond of riding in a cab with a hundred and ten thousand dollars' worth of rubies in my pocket and a stranger for sole companion. For he was a stranger — wasn't he? — and by his own account, not well-to-do. But that Russian had a knack of disarming suspicion. And, besides, how was it possible for me to have any doubts about a man who fought as he had over the percentage? It would have been nonsensical. So I did the rubies up in cotton, put them in a box, and off we went. On the way to the elevated you ought to have seen how the people stared at that coat. All the time he kept up a delightful flow of conversation. He told me any number of interesting things about his country, and when I asked if he had read 'The Journey Due North' he told me that he had, and that when Sala was in Russia his father had entertained him at his country-house a few versts from Moscow. Think of that, now! Altogether, he made himself most agreeable. I asked him on the way if he thought that inasmuch as I was to have the honor of seeing the grand duke, it would not be more in accordance with etiquette for me to put on a dress-coat. But he laughed, and said, no, the grand duke would never notice. Then he told me some very curious anecdotes about him — how, for instance, he fainted dead away at the sight of an apple, and yet kept a balloon and an aeronaut, just as Jones there might keep a dog-cart and a groom. He told me, among other things, that at Petersburg the grand duke had a pet tiger, which would accept food from no one but him, and on my asking how the tiger got along when the grand duke was away, he said that the grand duke had him stuffed. Oh, he was very

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entertaining, and spoke English better than you would have imagined. We walked over from Eighth Street to the hotel, and when we reached it he took me straight upstairs to his own room. 'If you will sit a minute,' he said, 'I will see if his Highness can receive you.' He went away, and I looked about me. The room into which I had been shown was a sitting-room with a bedroom opening from it. There was a writing-table standing against the door which led to the adjoining apartment, and while I was waiting I just glanced at the things with which the table was littered. There were a number of foreign newspapers, but in what language they were printed I could not make out; there was a package of official-looking documents tied with a string, a great blue envelope addressed in French to the Prince Michel Zaroguine and postmarked Washington, and back of all, in a frame, the photograph of a man."

For some minutes previous Mr. Fairbanks had been speaking quite composedly, though Jones, with the observant eye of his class, had noticed that near the ears his cheeks and his forehead as well were wet with perspiration. But now abruptly he grew unaccountably excited, and his speech displayed a feverish animation. His face had lost its scarlet; it had grown very white; and it seemed to the novelist that in some manner which he could not explain to himself, it had taken on a not unfamiliar aspect. "H'm!" he reflected, "it's odd. I know I never saw the man before, and I am sure that I do not particularly care ever to see him again. Leigh ought to have more sense than to bring an orang-outang even into such a club as the Smallpox. Besides, what does he mean by boring everyone to death? By gad, I believe he has put Leigh to sleep. It's worse than a play." But still he made no effort to move. In spite of himself, he felt vaguely fascinated, and though he declined to admit it, a trifle ill at ease.

"I took up the photograph," Mr. Fairbanks continued, "and while I was examining it, the Russian came back. In his hand he held a check-book. 'That's the grand duke himself,' he said. 'He will stop in here presently on his way out. There will be two or three members of the suite with him; and, that you may recognize his Highness at once, take a good look at the picture. When he comes in you must do this way: button your coat, please; thanks; now stand anywhere you like and make a low bow. Let me see you make one. Bravo! that is splendid. Only — how shall I say? — do not let your arms hang in that fashion. The grand duke might think you had dropped something and were stooping to pick it up. However, that is a minor matter. It may be that he won't see you at all. But of all things remember this: under no circumstances must you speak to him unless he first addresses you, and then you must merely answer his question. In other words, do not, I pray you, try to engage him in conversation.'

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'Does he speak English?' I asked. I couldn't help it. I was getting nervous. 'Now let us have the rubies,' he said. I took the box out of my breast-pocket and handed it to him. He opened it, drew the cotton aside, and ran his fingers lovingly over the gems. 'Yes,' he said, 'they will do.' Then he closed the box again, and put it in the drawer of the table at which he had taken a seat. 'If,' he continued, 'his Highness is satisfied, I will draw a draft for you, and Count Béziatnikoff will sign it. The count,' he went on to say, 'is the keeper of the Privy Purse. The draft itself is on the London Rothschilds, but they will cash it at Belmont's.' I did not quite like that arrangement: it did not seem entirely business-like. 'Your Excellency,' I said, 'it is the custom here to have checks for large amounts certified before they are offered in payment.' But I had to explain what certification meant before he understood me. 'That is nothing,' he said, 'that is nothing. If his Highness is pleased, we will go to Belmont's together, or, if you prefer, we will sit here and let one of the hotel clerks go to the bank in our stead.' There seemed to me nothing objectionable in that suggestion; for, after all, I could not exact of anyone, however grand-ducal he might be, to go about with a hundred and ten thousand dollars in his waistcoat."

"Or in his trousers either."

"Or in his trousers either, as you very properly put it. Now, *Mr.* Jones — Mr. Leigh, look at me; Colonel Barker — Colonel — I am coming to the point. Where's that waiter? Gentlemen, see here; watch that man there — watch Jones. Don't take your eyes off *Mr.* Jones, but listen, all of you, to what I say. Mr. Leigh, you are looking at me: look at your friend, I insist. *Mr.* Jones, *you*, if you care to, can look at me. Now, gentlemen, now —"

"Have you got a camera concealed about your person?"

"No, I have not, but I have something that came from one. You wait a minute, and I'll show it to you. I'll show it to you all. Where did I leave off?"

"In his waistcoat-pocket."

"Thank you: so I did. Well, gentlemen, we sat there talking as pleasantly as you please. The Russian joked a bit, and said that he wanted a certified check from me — the check for his commission, you remember — and presently he got up and said he would see what was delaying his Highness. So I sat awhile, twirling my thumbs. Five minutes passed, ten minutes passed. I looked at my watch: it was almost half-past two. That draft, I told myself, won't be cashed today. I went to the window and looked out. I went to the door: there was no one in the hall but a chambermaid. I went back to my seat, and then, moved by my own uneasiness, I opened the drawer of the table. *The box was gone!* I took the drawer out. It was one that extended the entire width of the table: the farther end of it had been cut off. I looked

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down and in through the place from which I had taken it. I could see into the next room! I pulled the table to one side, and there, just where the drawer had touched the wall against which it had stood, was an oblong opening cut through the wall itself. I was downstairs in an instant. Gentlemen, the grand duke had gone to Philadelphia that very morning. No such person as Prince Zaroguine lodged in the hotel. The clerk came upstairs with me. 'That room,' he said, 'is occupied by a Frenchman, and the adjoining room belongs to a man who registered from Boston. Why, that's his picture there!' he exclaimed, pointing to the picture of the grand duke. 'I did not even know that they were acquainted. But they will be back; they have left their things; they haven't even paid their bills.' I did not wait for their return: if I had, I might be waiting still. But I took the photograph, and down to Inspector Byrnes I posted. 'That,' said he, 'that is the picture of one of the cutest rogues in the land. He has as many names as the Czar of Russia himself.' And the original of that picture — gentlemen, here — Mr. Leigh, here — Colonel, here is the picture itself. I have kept it with me ever since. The original of that picture sits before you. Hold on to him, Colonel. Jones, if you move I'll put a bullet through you."

And then, before the astonished gaze of Alphabet Jones, Colonel Barker faded in a mist, Mr. Fairbanks lost his rotundity, his black coat changed to a blue swallow-tail with brass buttons, he grew twenty years younger, and became apologetic.

"It's six o'clock, sir," he said. "Will you order anything before the bar closes?"

Alphabet blinked his eyes. He was lying in a cramped position on the sofa. He was uncomfortable and very hot. He pulled himself together and looked around. Save for the waiter and himself, the room was deserted.

"Is there any baccarat going on upstairs?" he asked.

"No, sir; the gentlemen are just going away."

"Well, well," he mused, "that was vivid. H'm! I'll work it up as an actual occurrence and send it on to the *Interstate:* it will be good for the two hundred and fifty which I meant to make at baccarat. — I say, waiter, get me a Remsen cooler, please."

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will bring you: *The Jack of Diamonds*, a complete novelette by Q. Patrick. Also, *Two Exploits of Harry the Hat*, by Philip MacDonald, *Never Trust a Murderer*, by Quentin Reynolds, *The Good Prospect*, by Thomas Walsh, *The Rainbow Murders Begin*, by Raoul Whitfield, and a newly discovered Thinking Machine story, *The Leak*, by Jacques Futrelle.

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In your Editor's all-too-limited correspondence with Margery Allingham, the creator of Albert Campion has made a surprising number of illuminating references to her work and to the mood behind it. For example: we once asked Margery Allingham to consider writing more short stories about her lean, horn-spectacled criminologist; in reply Miss Allingham wrote: "Your request almost made me laugh. I am afraid it must have come in the days when I felt I should probably never write at all *again! Please forgive me. I am such a slow worker and I work in such a state of gloom that I always feel I am just on the point of discovering that the gift has deserted me forever. It must have been one of those days!"*

Breathes there the writer with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said — exactly the same thing! The countless days, the innumerable nights, that your Editor has felt that same dread — and we challenge any writer to deny his or her life-long membership to the same gloomy club.

Most of Margery Allingham's short stories about Albert Campion appeared in the "Strand" magazine, under the editorship of Reeves Shaw. Miss Allingham recalls that Reeves Shaw "kept us firmly to the classic pattern. I don't expect I shall ever write quite that sort of tale again — not that shape, *I mean — but I don't see why something different shouldn't be even more fun."*

We can't help conjecturing what magic of persuasion, what subtle inducement, what downright bribe, we could conjure up, offer, or suggest that would bring a new kind of Campion tale to readers of EQMM. Until such a consummation so devoutly to be wish'd, we can do no better than present another Campion short story never before published in America. It concerns a damsel in distress, "with eyes like licked brandy-balls," and a reckless young man who believed that "all this sentimental good-will-to-all-men-business is false and sickening" — and, of course, the Universal Uncle who played Detective Santa Claus in, praise the Lord, the classic pattern.

THE CASE IS ALTERED

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

MR. ALBERT CAMPION, sitting in a first-class smoking compartment, was just reflecting sadly that an atmosphere of stultifying decency could make even Christmas something of a stuffed-owl occasion, when a new hogskin suitcase of distinctive design hit him on the knees. At the same moment a golf bag bruised the shins of the shy young man opposite,

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an armful of assorted magazines burst over the pretty girl in the far corner, and a blast of icy air swept round the carriage. There was the familiar rattle and lurch which indicates that the train has started at last, a squawk from a receding porter, and Lance Feering arrived before him apparently by rocket.

"Caught it," said the newcomer with the air of one confidently expecting congratulations, but as the train bumped jerkily he teetered back on his heels and collapsed between the two young people on the opposite seat.

"My dear chap, so we noticed," murmured Campion, and he smiled apologetically at the girl, now disentangling herself from the shellburst of newsprint. It was his own disarming my-poor-friend-is-afflicted variety of smile that he privately considered infallible, but on this occasion it let him down.

The girl, who was in the early twenties and was slim and fair, with eyes like licked brandy-balls, as Lance Feering inelegantly put it afterwards, regarded him with grave interest. She stacked the magazines into a neat bundle and placed them on the seat opposite before returning to her own book. Even Mr. Feering, who was in one of his more exuberant moods, was aware of that chilly protest. He began to apologize.

Campion had known Feering in his student days, long before he had become one of the foremost designers of stage décors in Europe, and was used to him, but now even he was impressed. Lance's apologies were easy but also abject. He collected his bag, stowed it on a clear space on the rack above the shy young man's head, thrust his golf things under the seat, positively blushed when he claimed his magazines, and regarded the girl with pathetic humility. She glanced at him when he spoke, nodded coolly with just enough graciousness not to be gauche, and turned over a page.

Campion was secretly amused. At the top of his form Lance was reputed to be irresistible. His dark face with the long mournful nose and bright eyes were unhandsome enough to be interesting and the quick gestures of his short painter's hands made his conversation picturesque. His singular lack of success on this occasion clearly astonished him and he sat back in his corner eyeing the young woman with covert mistrust.

Campion resettled himself to the two hours' rigid silence which etiquette demands from first-class travelers who, although they are more than probably going to be asked to dance a reel together if not to share a bathroom only a few hours hence, have not yet been introduced.

There was no way of telling if the shy young man and the girl with the brandy-ball eyes knew each other, and whether they too were en route for Underhill, Sir Philip Cookham's Norfolk place. Campion was inclined to regard the coming festivities with a certain amount of lugubrious curiosity. Cookham himself was a magnifi-

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cent old boy, of course, "one of the more valuable pieces in the Cabinet," as someone had once said of him, but Florence was a different kettle of fish. Born to wealth and breeding, she had grown blasé towards both of them and now took her delight in notabilities, a dangerous affectation in Campion's experience. She was some sort of remote aunt of his.

He glanced again at the young people, caught the boy unaware, and was immediately interested.

The illustrated magazine had dropped from the young man's hand and he was looking out of the window, his mouth drawn down at the corners and a narrow frown between his thick eyebrows. It was not an unattractive face, too young for strong character but decent and open enough in the ordinary way. At that particular moment, however, it wore a revealing expression. There was recklessness in the twist of the mouth and sullenness in the eyes, while the hand which lay upon the inside arm-rest was clenched.

Campion was curious. Young people do not usually go away for Christmas in this top-step-at-the-dentist's frame of mind. The girl looked up from her book.

"How far is Underhill from the station?" she inquired.

"Five miles. They'll meet us." The shy young man turned to her so easily and with such obvious affection that any romantic theory Campion might have formed was knocked on the head instantly. The youngster's troubles evidently had nothing to do with love.

Lance had raised his head with bright-eyed interest at the gratuitous information and now a faintly sardonic expression appeared upon his lips. Campion sighed for him. For a man who fell in and out of love with the abandonment of a seal round a pool, Lance Feering was an impossible optimist. Already he was regarding the girl with that shy despair which so many ladies had found too piteous to be allowed to persist. Campion washed his hands of him and turned away just in time to notice a stranger glancing in at them from the corridor. It was a dark and arrogant young face and he recognized it instantly, feeling at the same time a deep wave of sympathy for old Cookham. Florence, he gathered, had done it again.

Young Victor Preen, son of old Preen of the Preen Aero Company, was certainly notable, not to say notorious. He had obtained much publicity in his short life for his sensational flights, but a great deal more for adventures less creditable; and when angry old gentlemen in the armchairs of exclusive clubs let themselves go about the blackguardliness of the younger generation, it was very often of Victor Preen that they were thinking.

He stood now a little to the left of the compartment window, leaning idly against the wall, his chin up and his heavy lids drooping. At first sight he did not appear to be taking any interest in the occupants of the compartment, but when the shy young man looked up, Campion happened

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to see the swift glance of recognition, and of something else, which passed between them. Presently, still with the same elaborate casualness, the man in the corridor wandered away, leaving the other staring in front of him, the same sullen expression still in his eyes.

The incident passed so quickly that it was impossible to define the exact nature of that second glance, but Campion was never a man to go imagining things, which was why he was surprised when they arrived at Minstree station to hear Henry Boule, Florence's private secretary, introducing the two and to notice that they met as strangers.

It was pouring with rain as they came out of the station, and Boule, who, like all Florence's secretaries, appeared to be suffering from an advanced case of nerves, bundled them all into two big Daimlers, a smaller car, and a shooting-brake. Campion looked round him at Florence's Christmas bag with some dismay. She had surpassed herself. Besides Lance there were at least half a dozen celebrities: a brace of political high-lights, an angry looking lady novelist, Nadja from the ballet, a startled R.A., and Victor Preen, as well as some twelve or thirteen unfamiliar faces who looked as if they might belong to Art, Money, or even mere Relations.

Campion became separated from Lance and was looking for him anxiously when he saw him at last in one of the cars, with the novelist on one side and the girl with brandy-ball eyes on the other, Victor Preen making up the ill-assorted four.

Since Campion was an unassuming sort of person he was relegated to the brake with Boule himself, the shy young man and the whole of the luggage. Boule introduced them awkwardly and collapsed into a seat, wiping the beads from off his forehead with a relief which was a little too blatant to be tactful.

Campion, who had learned that the shy young man's name was Peter Groome, made a tentative inquiry of him as they sat jolting shoulder to shoulder in the back of the car. He nodded.

"Yes, it's the same family," he said. "Cookham's sister married a brother of my father's. I'm some sort of relation, I suppose."

The prospect did not seem to fill him with any great enthusiasm and once again Campion's curiosity was piqued. Young Mr. Groome was certainly not in seasonable mood.

In the ordinary way Campion would have dismissed the matter from his mind, but there was something about the youngster which attracted him, something indefinable and of a despairing quality, and moreover there had been that curious intercepted glance in the train.

They talked in a desultory fashion throughout the uncomfortable journey. Campion learned that young Groome was in his father's firm of solicitors, that he was engaged to be married to the girl with the brandy-ball eyes, who was a Miss Patricia

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Bullard of an old north country family, and that he thought Christmas was a waste of time.

"I hate it," he said with a sudden passionate intensity which startled even his mild inquisitor. "All this sentimental good-will-to-all-men-business is false and sickening. There's no such thing as good-will. The world's rotten."

He blushed as soon as he had spoken and turned away.

"I'm sorry," he murmured, "but all this bogus Dickensian stuff makes me writhe."

Campion made no direct comment. Instead he asked with affable inconsequence, "Was that young Victor Preen I saw in the other car?"

Peter Groome turned his head and regarded him with the steady stare of the wilfully obtuse.

"I was introduced to someone with a name like that, I think," he said carefully. "He was a little baldish man, wasn't he?"

"No, that's Sir George." The secretary leaned over the luggage to give the information. "Preen is the tall young man, rather handsome, with the very curling hair. He's *the* Preen, you know." He sighed. "It seems very young to be a millionaire, doesn't it?"

"Obscenely so," said Mr. Peter Groome abruptly, and returned to his despairing contemplation of the landscape.

Underhill was *en fête* to receive them. As soon as Campion observed the preparations, his sympathy for young Mr. Groome increased, for to a jaundiced eye Lady Florence's display might well have proved as dispiriting as Preen's bank balance. Florence had "gone all Dickens," as she said herself at the top of her voice, linking her arm through Campion's, clutching the R.A. with her free hand, and capturing Lance with a bright birdlike eye.

The great Jacobean house was festooned with holly. An eighteen foot tree stood in the great hall. Yule logs blazed on iron dogs in the wide hearths and already the atmosphere was thick with that curious Christmas smell which is part cigar smoke and part roasting food.

Sir Philip Cookham stood receiving his guests with pathetic bewilderment. Every now and again his features broke into a smile of genuine welcome as he saw a face he knew. He was a distinguished-looking old man with a fine head and eyes permanently worried by his country's troubles.

"My dear boy, delighted to see you. Delighted," he said, grasping Campion's hand. "I'm afraid you've been put over in the Dower House. Did Florence tell you? She said you wouldn't mind, but I insisted that Feering went over there with you and also young Peter." He sighed and brushed away the visitor's hasty reassurances. "I don't know why the dear girl never feels she has a party unless the house is so overcrowded that our best friends have to sleep in the annex," he said sadly.

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The "dear girl," looking not more than fifty-five of her sixty years, was clinging to the arm of the lady novelist at that particular moment and the two women were emitting mirthless parrot cries at each other. Cookham smiled.

"She's happy, you know," he said indulgently. "She enjoys this sort of thing. Unfortunately I have a certain amount of urgent work to do this weekend, but we'll get in a chat, Campion, some time over the holiday. I want to hear your news. You're a lucky fellow. You can tell your adventures."

The lean man grimaced. "More secret sessions, sir?" he inquired.

The Cabinet Minister threw up his hands in a comic but expressive little gesture before he turned to greet the next guest.

As he dressed for dinner in his comfortable room in the small Georgian dower house across the park, Campion was inclined to congratulate himself on his quarters. Underhill itself was a little too much of the ancient monument for strict comfort.

He had reached the tie stage when Lance appeared. He came in very elegant indeed and highly pleased with himself. Campion diagnosed the symptoms immediately and remained irritatingly incurious.

Lance sat down before the open fire and stretched his sleek legs.

"It's not even as if I were a good looking blighter, you know," he observed invitingly when the silence had become irksome to him. "In fact, Campion, when I consider myself I simply can't understand it. Did I so much as speak to the girl?"

"I don't know," said Campion, concentrating on his dressing. "Did you?"

"No." Lance was passionate in his denial. "Not a word. The hard-faced female with the inky fingers and the walrus mustache was telling me her life story all the way home in the car. This dear little poppet with the eyes was nothing more than a warm bundle at my side. I give you my dying oath on that. And yet — well, it's extraordinary, isn't it?"

Campion did not turn round. He could see the artist quite well through the mirror in front of him. Lance had a sheet of note-paper in his hand and was regarding it with that mixture of feigned amusement and secret delight which was typical of his eternally youthful spirit.

"Extraordinary," he repeated, glancing at Campion's unresponsive back. "She had nice eyes. Like licked brandy-balls."

"Exactly," agreed the lean man by the dressing table. "I thought she seemed very taken up with her fiancé, young Master Groome, though," he added tactlessly.

"Well, I noticed that, you know," Lance admitted, forgetting his professions of disinterest. "She hardly recognized my existence in the train. Still, there's absolutely no accounting for women. I've studied 'em all my life and never understood 'em yet. I mean to say, take this case in point.

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That kid ignored me, avoided me, looked through me. And yet look at this. I found it in my room when I came up to change just now."

Campion took the note with a certain amount of distaste. Lovely women were invariably stooping to folly, it seemed, but even so he could not accustom himself to the spectacle. The message was very brief. He read it at a glance and for the first time that day he was conscious of that old familiar flicker down the spine as his experienced nose smelled trouble. He re-read the five lines.

> "There is a sundial on a stone pavement just off the drive. We saw it from the car. I'll wait ten minutes there for you half an hour after the party breaks up tonight."

There was neither signature nor initial, and the summons broke off as baldly as it had begun.

"Amazing, isn't it?" Lance had the grace to look shamefaced.

"Astounding." Campion's tone was flat. "Staggering, old boy. Er — fishy."

"Fishy?"

"Yes, don't you think so?" Campion was turning over the single sheet thoughtfully and there was no amusement in the pale eyes behind his horn-rimmed spectacles. "How did it arrive?"

"In an unaddressed envelope. I don't suppose she caught my name. After all, there must be some people who don't know it yet." Lance was grinning impudently. "She's batty, of course. Not safe out and all the rest of it. But I liked her eyes and she's very young."

Campion perched himself on the edge of the table. He was still very serious.

"It's disturbing, isn't it?" he said. "Not nice. Makes one wonder."

"Oh, I don't know." Lance retrieved his property and tucked it into his pocket. "She's young and foolish, and it's Christmas."

Campion did not appear to have heard him. "I wonder," he said. "I should keep the appointment, I think. It may be unwise to interfere, but yes, I rather think I should."

"You're telling me." Lance was laughing. "I may be wrong, of course," he added defensively, "but I think that's a cry for help. The poor girl evidently saw that I looked a dependable sort of chap and — er — having her back against the wall for some reason or other she turned instinctively to the stranger with the kind face. Isn't that how you read it?"

"Since you press me, no. Not exactly," said Campion, and as they walked over to the house together he remained thoughtful and irritatingly uncommunicative.

Florence Cookham excelled herself that evening. Her guests were exhorted "to be young again," with the inevitable result that Underhill contained a company of irritated and exhausted people long before midnight.

One of her ladyship's more erroneous beliefs was that she was a born or-

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ganizer, and that the real secret of entertaining people lay in giving everyone something to do. Thus Lance and the R.A. — now even more startled-looking than ever — found themselves superintending the decoration of the great tree, while the girl with the brandy-ball eyes conducted a small informal dance in the drawing room, the lady novelist scowled over the bridge table, and the ballet star refused flatly to arrange amateur theatricals.

Only two people remained exempt from this tyranny. One was Sir Philip himself, who looked in every now and again, ready to plead urgent work awaiting him in his study whenever his wife pounced upon him, and the other was Mr. Campion, who had work to do on his own account and had long mastered the difficult art of self-effacement. Experience had taught him that half the secret of this maneuver was to keep discreetly on the move and he strolled from one party to another, always ready to look as if he belonged to any one of them should his hostess's eye ever come to rest upon him inquiringly.

For once his task was comparatively simple. Florence was in her element as she rushed about surrounded by breathless assistants, and at one period the very air in her vicinity seemed to have become thick with colored paper-wrappings, yards of red ribbons and a colored snowstorm of little address tickets as she directed the packing of the presents for the Tenants' Tree, a second monster which stood in the ornamental barn beyond the kitchens.

Campion left Lance to his fate, which promised to be six or seven hours' hard labor at the most moderate estimate, and continued his purposeful meandering. His lean figure drifted among the company with an apparent aimlessness which was deceptive. There was hidden urgency in his lazy movements and his pale eyes behind his spectacles were inquiring and unhappy.

He found Patricia Bullard dancing with young Preen, and paused to watch them as they swung gracefully by him. The man was in a somewhat flamboyant mood, flashing his smile and his noisy witticisms about him after the fashion of his kind, but the girl was not so content. As Campion caught sight of her pale face over her partner's sleek shoulder his eyebrows rose. For an instant he almost believed in Lance's unlikely suggestion. The girl actually did look as though she had her back to the wall. She was watching the doorway nervously and her shiny eyes were afraid.

Campion looked about him for the other young man who should have been present, but Peter Groome was not in the ballroom, nor in the great hall, nor yet among the bridge tables in the drawing-room, and half an hour later he had still not put in an appearance.

Campion was in the hall himself when he saw Patricia slip into the anteroom which led to Sir Philip's private study, that holy of holies which even Florence treated with a whole-

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some awe. Campion had paused for a moment to enjoy the spectacle of Lance, wild eyed and tight lipped, wrestling with the last of the blue glass balls and tinsel streamers on the Guests' Tree, when he caught sight of the flare of her silver skirt disappearing round a familiar doorway under one branch of the huge double staircase.

It was what he had been waiting for, and yet when it came his disappointment was unexpectedly acute, for he too had liked her smile and her brandy-ball eyes. The door was ajar when he reached it, and he pushed it open an inch or so farther, pausing on the threshold to consider the scene within. Patricia was on her knees before the paneled door which led into the inner room and was trying somewhat ineffectually to peer through the keyhole.

Campion stood looking at her regretfully, and when she straightened herself and paused to listen, with every line of her young body taut with the effort of concentration, he did not move.

Sir Philip's voice amid the noisy chatter behind him startled him, however, and he swung round to see the old man talking to a group on the other side of the room. A moment later the girl brushed past him and hurried away.

Campion went quietly into the anteroom. The study door was still closed and he moved over to the enormous period fireplace which stood beside it. This particular fireplace, with its carved and painted front, its wrought iron dogs and deeply recessed inglenooks, was one of the showpieces of Underhill.

At the moment the fire had died down and the interior of the cavern was dark, warm, and inviting. Campion stepped inside and sat down on the oak settle, where the shadows swallowed him. He had no intention of being unduly officious, but his quick ears had caught a faint sound in the inner room and Sir Philip's private sanctum was no place for furtive movements when its master was out of the way. He had not long to wait.

A few moments later the study door opened very quietly and someone came out. The newcomer moved across the room with a nervous, unsteady tread, and paused abruptly, his back to the quiet figure in the inglenook.

Campion recognized Peter Groome and his thin mouth narrowed. He was sorry. He had liked the boy.

The youngster stood irresolute. He had his hands behind him, holding in one of them a flamboyant parcel wrapped in the colored paper and scarlet ribbon which littered the house. A sound from the hall seemed to fluster him for he spun round, thrust the parcel into the inglenook which was the first hiding place to present itself, and returned to face the new arrival. It was the girl again. She came slowly across the room, her hands outstretched and her face raised to Peter's.

In view of everything, Campion

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thought it best to stay where he was, nor had he time to do anything else. She was speaking urgently, passionate sincerity in her low voice.

"Peter, I've been looking for you. Darling, there's something I've got to say and if I'm making an idiotic mistake then you've got to forgive me. Look here, you wouldn't go and do anything silly, would you? Would you, Peter? Look at me."

"My dear girl." He was laughing unsteadily and not very convincingly with his arms around her. "What on earth are you talking about?"

She drew back from him and peered earnestly into his face.

"You wouldn't, would you? Not even if it meant an awful lot. Not even if for some reason or other you felt you *had* to. Would you?"

He turned from her helplessly, a great weariness in the lines of his sturdy back, but she drew him round, forcing him to face her.

"Would he what, my dear?"

Florence's arch inquiry from the doorway separated them so hurriedly that she laughed delightedly and came briskly into the room, her gray curls a trifle disheveled and her draperies flowing.

"Too divinely young. I love it!" she said devastatingly. "I must kiss you both. Christmas is the time for love and youth and all the other dear charming things, isn't it? That's why I adore it. But, my dears, not here. Not in this silly poky little room. Come along and help me, both of you, and then you can slip away and dance together later on. But don't come in this room. This is Philip's dull part of the house. Come along this minute. Have you seen my precious tree? Too incredibly distinguished, my darlings, with two great artists at work on it. You shall both tie on a candle. Come along."

She swept them away like an avalanche. No protest was possible. Peter shot a single horrified glance towards the fireplace, but Florence was gripping his arm; he was thrust out into the hall and the door closely firmly behind him.

Campion was left in his corner with the parcel less than a dozen feet away from him on the opposite bench. He moved over and picked it up. It was a long flat package wrapped in holly-printed tissue. Moreover, it was unexpectedly heavy and the ends were unbound.

He turned it over once or twice, wrestling with a strong disinclination to interfere, but a vivid recollection of the girl with the brandy-ball eyes, in her silver dress, her small pale face alive with anxiety, made up his mind for him and, sighing, he pulled the ribbon.

The typewritten folder which fell on to his knees surprised him at first, for it was not at all what he had expected, nor was its title, "Report on Messrs. Anderson and Coleridge, Messrs. Saunders, Duval and Berry, and Messrs. Birmingham and Rose," immediately enlightening, and when he opened it at random a column of incomprehensible figures confronted

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him. It was a scribbled pencil note in a precise hand at the foot of one of the pages which gave him his first clue.

"These figures are estimated by us to be a reliable forecast of this firm's full working capacity,"

he read, and after that he became very serious indeed.

Two hours later it was bitterly cold in the garden and a thin white mist hung over the dark shrubbery which lined the drive when Mr. Campion, picking his way cautiously along the clipped grass verge, came quietly down to the sundial walk. Behind him the gabled roofs of Underhill were shadowy against a frosty sky. There were still a few lights in the upper windows, but below stairs the entire place was in darkness.

Campion hunched his greatcoat about him and plodded on, unwonted severity in the lines of his thin face.

He came upon the sundial walk at last and paused, straining his eyes to see through the mist. He made out the figure standing by the stone column, and heaved a sigh of relief as he recognized the jaunty shoulders of the Christmas tree decorator. Lance's incurable romanticism was going to be useful at last, he reflected with wry amusement.

He did not join his friend but withdrew into the shadows of a great clump of rhododendrons and composed himself to wait. He intensely disliked the situation in which he found himself. Apart from the extreme physical discomfort involved, he had a natural aversion towards the project on hand, but little fair-haired girls with shiny eyes can be very appealing.

It was a freezing vigil. He could hear Lance stamping about in the mist, swearing softly to himself, and even that supremely comic phenomenon had its unsatisfactory side.

They were both shivering and the mist's damp fingers seemed to have stroked their very bones when at last Campion stiffened. He had heard a rustle behind him and presently there was a movement in the wet leaves, followed by the sharp ring of feet on the stones. Lance swung round immediately, only to drop back in astonishment as a tall figure bore down.

"Where is it?"

Neither the words nor the voice came as a complete surprise to Campion, but the unfortunate Lance was taken entirely off his guard.

"Why, hello, Preen," he said involuntarily. "What the devil are you doing here?"

The newcomer had stopped in his tracks, his face a white blur in the uncertain light. For a moment he stood perfectly still and then, turning on his heel, he made off without a word.

"Ah, but I'm afraid it's not quite so simple as that, my dear chap."

Campion stepped out of his friendly shadows and as the younger man passed, slipped an arm through his and swung him round to face the startled Lance, who was coming up at the double.

"You can't clear off like this," he

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went on, still in the same affable, conversational tone. "You have something to give Peter Groome, haven't you? Something he rather wants?"

"Who the hell are you?" Preen jerked up his arm as he spoke and might have wrenched himself free had it not been for Lance, who had recognized Campion's voice and, although completely in the dark, was yet quick enough to grasp certain essentials.

"That's right, Preen," he said, seizing the man's other arm in a bear's hug. "Hand it over. Don't be a fool. Hand it over."

This line of attack appeared to be inspirational, since they felt the powerful youngster stiffen between them.

"Look here, how many people know about this?"

"The world ——" Lance was beginning cheerfully when Campion forestalled him.

"We three and Peter Groome," he said quietly. "At the moment Sir Philip has no idea that Messrs. Preen's curiosity concerning the probable placing of Government orders for aircraft parts has overstepped the bounds of common sense. You're acting alone, I suppose?"

"Oh, lord, yes, of course." Preen was cracking dangerously. "If my old man gets to hear of this I — oh, well, I might as well go and crash."

"I thought so." Campion sounded content. "Your father has a reputation to consider. So has our young friend Groome. You'd better hand it over."

"What?"

"Since you force me to be vulgar, whatever it was you were attempting to use as blackmail, my precious young friend," he said. "Whatever it may be, in fact, that you hold over young Groome and were trying to use in your attempt to force him to let you have a look at a confidential Government report concerning the orders which certain aircraft firms were likely to receive in the next six months. In your position you could have made pretty good use of them, couldn't you? Frankly, I haven't the faintest idea what this incriminating document may be. When I was young, objectionably wealthy youths accepted I.O.U.s from their poorer companions, but now that's gone out of fashion. What's the modern equivalent? An R.D. check, I suppose?"

Preen said nothing. He put his hand in an inner pocket and drew out an envelope which he handed over without a word. Campion examined the slip of pink paper within by the light of a pencil torch.

"You kept it for quite a time before trying to cash it, didn't you?" he said. "Dear me, that's rather an old trick and it was never admired. Young men who are careless with their accounts have been caught out like that before. It simply wouldn't have looked good to his legal-minded old man, I take it? You two seem to be hampered by your respective papas' integrity. Yes, well, you can go now."

Preen hesitated, opened his mouth to protest, but thought better of it. Lance looked after his retreating fig-

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ure for some little time before he returned to his friend.

"Who wrote that blinking note?" he demanded.

"He did, of course," said Campion brutally. "He wanted to see the report but was making absolutely sure that young Groome took all the risks of being found with it."

"Preen wrote the note," Lance repeated blankly.

"Well, naturally," said Campion absently. "That was obvious as soon as the report appeared in the picture. He was the only man in the place with the necessary special information to make use of it."

Lance made no comment. He pulled his coat collar more closely about his throat and stuffed his hands into his pockets.

All the same the artist was not quite satisfied, for, later still, when Campion was sitting in his dressing-gown writing a note at one of the little escritoires which Florence so thoughtfully provided in her guest bedrooms, he came padding in again and stood warming himself before the fire.

"Why?" he demanded suddenly. "Why did I get the invitation?"

"Oh, that was a question of luggage." Campion spoke over his shoulder. "That bothered me at first, but as soon as we fixed it onto Preen that little mystery became blindingly clear. Do you remember falling into the carriage this afternoon? Where did you put your elegant piece of gent's natty suitcasing? Over young Groome's head. Preen saw it from the corridor and assumed that the chap was sitting *under his own bag!* He sent his own man over here with the note, told him not to ask for Peter by name but to follow the nice new pigskin suitcase upstairs."

Lance nodded regretfully. "Very likely," he said sadly. "Funny thing. I was sure it was the girl."

After a while he came over to the desk. Campion put down his pen and indicated the written sheet.

> "Dear Groome," it ran, "I enclose a little matter that I should burn forthwith. The package you left in the inglenook is still there, right at the back on the left-hand side, cunningly concealed under a pile of logs. It has not been seen by anyone who could possibly understand it. If you nipped over very early this morning you could return it to its appointed place without any trouble. If I may venture a word of advice, it is never worth it."

The author grimaced. "It's a bit avuncular," he admitted awkwardly, "but what else can I do? His light is still on, poor chap. I thought I'd stick it under his door."

Lance was grinning wickedly.

"That's fine," he murmured. "The old man does his stuff for reckless youth. There's just the signature now and that ought to be as obvious as everything else has been to you. I'll write it for you. 'Merry Christmas. Love from Santa Claus.'"

"You win," said Mr. Campion.

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THE MANIAC

by MAURICE LEVEL

He was neither malicious nor bloodthirsty. It was only that he had conceived a very special idea of the pleasures of existence. Perhaps it was that, having tried them all, he no longer found the thrill of the unexpected in any of them.

He went to the theater, not to follow the piece, or to look through his opera-glasses at the spectators, but because he hoped that some day a fire might break out. At the fair of Neuilly he visited the various menageries in anticipation of a catastrophe: the tamer attacked by the beasts. He had tried bull-fights, but soon tired of them; the slaughter appeared too well-regulated, too natural, and it disgusted him to watch suffering.

What he was always looking for was the quick and keen anguish caused by some unexpected disaster, some new kind of accident; so much so that, having been at the Opéra Comique on the night of the great fire, from which he escaped unhurt and having been a couple of steps from the cage the day the celebrated Fred was devoured by his lions, he lost almost all interest in theaters and menageries. To those who were astonished at this apparent change in his tastes, he replied:

"But there's nothing more to see there. They don't give me the slightest sensation. All that I care for is the effect produced on others and on me."

When he was deprived of these two favorite pleasures — it had taken him ten years to get what he wanted from them — he fell into a state of mental and physical depression, and for some months rarely left his house.

Then came a morning when the walls of Paris were covered with multicolored posters that showed, on an azure background, a curious inclined track which came down, wound round, and fell like a ribbon. Up at the top, tiny as a dot, a cyclist seemed to be waiting for a signal to rush down the giddy descent. At the same time the newspapers gave accounts of an extraordinary feat that explained the meaning of this weird picture.

It seemed that the cyclist dashed down the narrow path at full speed, went up round the loop, then down to the bottom. For a second during this fantastic performance he was head downward, his feet up in the air.

The acrobat invited the press to come and examine the track and the machine so that they might see there was no trickery about it, and he explained that his ability to perform the feat was due to calculations of extreme precision and that, so long as he kept his nerve, nothing could prevent its accomplishment.

From "Tales of Mystery and Horror," by Maurice Level, copyright, 1920, by Robert M. McBride & Co.

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Now it is certain that when the life of a man hangs on keeping his nerve, it hangs on a very insecure peg!

Since the appearance of the advertisement, our maniac had recovered some of his good humor. He went to the private demonstration, and becoming convinced that a new sensation awaited him, was in a seat on the first night to watch closely this looping the loop.

He had taken a box that faced the end of the track, and he sat there alone, not wishing to have near him anyone who might distract his close attention.

The whole thing was over in a few minutes. He had just time to see the black speck appear on the whiteness of the track, a formidable spurt, a plunge, a gigantic bound, and that was all. It gave him a thrill, swift and vivid as lightning.

But as he went out with the crowd he reflected that though he might feel this sensation twice or thrice, it must eventually pall, as all the others had done. He had not found what he was looking for. Then came the thought that a man's nerve has limitations, that the strength of a bicycle is, after all, only relative, and that there is no track of the kind, however secure it may seem, that may not some time give way. And he arrived at the conclusion that it was inevitable that some day an accident must occur.

From this to deciding to watch for that accident was a very small step.

"I will go to see this looping of the loop every night," he decided. "I will go till I see that man break his head. If it doesn't happen during this three months in Paris I will follow him elsewhere till it does."

For two months, every evening at the same time, he went to the same box and sat in the same seat. The management had grown to know him. He had taken the box for the whole period of the turn, and they wondered vainly about this costly whim.

One evening, when the acrobat had gone through his performance earlier than usual, he saw him in a corridor and went up to him. There was no need for an introduction.

"I know you already," said the bicyclist. "You are always at the hall. You come every night."

Surprised, the thrill-seeker said: "It is true I am deeply interested in your performance . . . But who has told you so?"

The man smiled: "No one. I see you."

"That is very surprising. At such a height . . . at such a moment . . . your mind is sufficiently free to pick out the spectators down below?"

"Certainly not. I don't see the spectators down below. It would be extremely dangerous for me to pay any attention to a crowd that moves and chatters. In all matters connected with my profession, in addition to the turn itself, its theory and practice, there is something else, a kind of trick . . ."

The maniac started. "A trick?"

"Don't misunderstand me. I don't mean trickery. I mean something of which the public has no suspicion,

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something that is perhaps the most delicate part of the whole performance. Shall I explain? Well, I accept it as a fact that it is not possible to empty the brain till it contains but one idea, impossible to keep the mind fixed on any one thought. As complete concentration is necessary, I choose in the hall some one object on which I fix my eyes. I see nothing but that object. From the second I have my gaze on it, nothing else exists. I get on the saddle. My hands gripping the bars, I think of nothing; neither of my balance, nor my direction. I am sure of my muscles; they are as firm as steel. There is only one part of me I am afraid of: my eyes. But once I have fixed them on something, I am sure of them as well.

"Now, the first night I performed here, it happened that my eyes fell on your box. I saw you. I saw nothing but you. Without knowing it, you caught and held my eyes . . . You became the point, the object of which I have told you. The second day I looked for you at the same place. The following days it was the same. And so it happens that now, as soon as I appear, by instinct my eyes turn to you. You help me; you are the precious aid indispensable to my performance. Now do you understand why I know you?"

Next day the maniac was in his usual seat. In the hall there were the usual movements and murmurs of keen anticipation. Suddenly a dense silence fell: that profound silence when you feel that an audience is holding its breath. The acrobat was on his machine which was held by two men, waiting for the signal to set off. He was balanced to perfection, his hands grasping the bar, his head up, his gaze fixed straight ahead.

He cried "Hop!" and the men pushed him off.

Just at that moment, in the most natural way possible, the maniac rose, pushed back his seat, and went to one at the other side of the box. Then a terrible thing happened. The cyclist was thrown violently up in the air. His machine rushed forward, flew up, and lurching out into the midst of the shrieks of terror that filled the hall, fell in the crowd.

With a methodical gesture the maniac put on his overcoat, smoothed his hat on the cuff of his sleeve, and went out.

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Dale Clark's first short story about Munro, the I.B. man, won an Honorable Mention in EQMM's Third Annual Prize Contest. We liked Munro so much that we asked the author to consider developing a series around his slightly built, gray, inconspicuous lab man — the scientific little sleuth with the encyclopedic knowledge of police history. Well, Mr. Clark responded, and here is the second story in what we hope will some day be a saga. Again you will follow the scarlet thread of murder, this time with all the facts in your possession, and with Munro, in his quiet way, pushing inexorably to the truth. But how? Watch Munro at work, using his Kieranesque detective data, his inexhaustible larcenous lore, as an integral part of the very investigation itself.

VARIOUS TRACES

by DALE CLARK

OMAR'S TENT lay hard by Washington Square. It was distinguished by a striped canvas pavilion under which stood a brown-bearded doorman who always wore a white burnoose. Within, the bartenders and the waiters sported tasseled fezzes. Mr. Baxitte, the owner-manager-headwaiter, invariably appeared in a beret and smock, and liked having a few Village longhairs about; they lent his dive a bohemian atmosphere, relished by bourgeois businessmen from Columbus Circle and Columbus, Ohio.

For what does the settled and sedate citizen love better than to rub elbows with art and artists and artists' models?

Mr. Baxitte liked to murmur of his own Left Bank days, and had his walls hung with advanced paintings — advanced, said he chucklingly, by impecunious Greenwich Village modernists who could not pay their bar chits.

The truth was something else.

Mr. Baxitte hailed from Buffalo, N. Y., where he had tended bar in an establishment next-door to the gallery of a dealer named Chibou. Joseph Chibou sometimes brought in his customers for refreshment; Mr. Baxitte picked up a little professional jargon, and a notion of what paintings were worth. The first modern painting that he ever saw was exhibited in Chibou's window and when he had stopped laughing, it occurred to Mr. Baxitte that he could do as well. Indeed, he tried, and showed the result to the dealer.

"You've just enough talent to ruin yourself," said the older man. "Do you realize I'm forty, and a virtual bankrupt?"

The next weekend the gallery burned down, and Joseph Chibou

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was arrested for arson. He got fifteen years. Mr. Baxitte had nearly forgotten the matter when, a year later, the postman came into the bar.

"Do you," said he, "know anybody named Cabot, used to work next door?"

Mr. Baxitte did not, but he contrived a glimpse of the envelope in the other's hand. It bore the return address of a storage warehouse. Mr. Baxitte went around to the warehouse, and paid three months further storage on one John Cabot's possessions. And presently ordered the boxes shipped to New York City.

The haul turned out to include the superior portion of Joseph Chibou's stock — good, authentic, last-century American and English merchandise — $50,000 worth, if Mr. Baxitte had been able to sell the lot straight off.

Of course, he could sell but one picture at a time. After a bold run of preliminary luck, Mr. Baxitte encountered a dealer who knew last-century American and English painting altogether too well — he escaped only by felling the suspicious man with his fist. He was impelled to rush home, spread a liberal coat of varnish upon the remaining canvases, and over-paint them with daubed, futuristic abstractions . . . in case anyone came snooping.

That had been long ago.

Nowadays, it was but rarely Mr. Baxitte took down a picture from his wall, and scraped it, and cleansed away the varnish layer with dilute acetic acid, and visited a dealer in Boston or Philadelphia or Chicago.

One night the shocking thing happened. At a moment when the doorman chanced to be opening a taxicab at the curb, a gentleman turned from the sidewalk through the pavilion into Omar's Tent. The small front bar was lined, and the bartenders busy. Not even the hat-check girl noticed the gentleman, because the cab's ruddy-faced, blue-suited passenger had claimed her attention.

Ahead of the gentleman was a double partition and double arch. Pausing, he peered into the back-room, a smoky and cramped chamber with its dim illumination centered on a waxed patch of dance floor that was also the floor-show stage.

To the left, between the partitions, a narrow stairwell plunged abruptly to the basement. Below, a phone booth faced the foot of the stairs; this was flanked by rest-rooms, and by a corridor-end door that said *Office — Private.*

When the gentleman had turned into the corridor, an opened doorway under the stairs became visible. A youth wearing an absurdly small mustache and an absurdly large, flowing necktie crouched over a packing-box, sketching furiously on an art pad.

But his attention was riveted upon a young woman, brunette and theatrically made-up, having a great many silverish spangles in her headdress, her bodice, and her baggy green silk pantaloons that were meant

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to suggest an Ouled-Nail dancing girl's costume. She, being deeper in the room, could not see the gentleman at all.

He stepped on, and pushed open the office door. More pictures were ranged about the walls within; in the corner a steel-safe's door yawned open; at the desk, Mr. Baxitte (who had emptied a cigarette vending machine upstairs a few minutes earlier) was sweeping coins into a leather bank pouch.

Mr. Baxitte looked up.

"It hasn't been fifteen years. Barely ten," said he. Indignantly.

"I'm paroled," said Joseph Chibou.

There was a pause.

"What the devil are you doing here?" said Mr. Baxitte.

"There was nothing for me in Buffalo," replied Joseph Chibou. Significantly. "I've got a job at Voicsin's Studios, uptown. The other day an Abbey came in for reframing — one of *my* Abbeys. I've made a few inquiries, and here I am."

"I don't get it."

"How many of my Buffalo acquaintances do you suppose have come to New York, and done well financially?" said Joseph Chibou. "I asked casually where the customer got his Abbey; I've the dealer's name; you might like to come face to face with the dealer, but I don't think so."

There was a longer pause.

"You want money, eh?" said Mr. Baxitte.

"I want your signed confession, first off." Mr. Baxitte stood up. "Or else I'll have to go to the police."

"You? You're in this as deep as I am."

"I've served my time," Chibou said. "I got nothing from the insurance company. The pictures are mine. You're guilty of grand larceny. I don't mind picking up the phone —"

He lifted the desk phone and stooped toward the dial.

Mr. Baxitte's plump hand closed on the bank pouch. He struck quickly.

Joseph Chibou fell, sprawled, across the desk. There was no blood. But he did not appear to be breathing.

Mr. Baxitte ran across the room, wrenched open the door, and peered into the corridor. It was empty.

He closed and locked the door and returned to the motionless Chibou.

Keys, coins, a penknife, cigarettes, booklet matches, made a small heap on the desk. There was a wallet that had *J. Chibou* lettered upon it in gold; it contained an identification card — *Joseph Chibou* — with an address on *135th St.;* there was a social security card, and a Voicsin Studio business card, and a receipted room-rent statement, and so on —

"None of this points at me."

Mr. Baxitte's brain had begun busily to plan.

"He's certain to have stuff in his room, though. So that's first, I've got to get there ahead of the police."

Brows knit, he peered at the victim.

"They've got his fingerprints. But it'll take them a while to check up on fingerprints and laundry marks."

Mr. Baxitte hurriedly stripped

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from the wallet those cards which bore the 135th Street address. As an afterthought, he removed the Voicsin card, too.

"Hang it, they may keep a file of ex-cons."

Mr. Baxitte's hand slid under his smock, and pulled his own wallet from his hip pocket. This was an ordinary tan leather billfold, and it contained an identification card which Mr. Baxitte had never troubled to fill out; his name was already upon a gasoline credit card in one compartment, and a motorist's license in another, and upon half a dozen other papers and cards.

He had never exhibited this billfold about Omar's Tent; a man's own night club is the last place in which he need open his personal wallet; besides, it was exactly similar to hundreds of thousands, or maybe millions, of identically manufactured billfolds.

Mr. Baxitte knew that fresh ink looks fresh. There was an indelible pencil somewhere in a desk drawer. He searched and filled out the identity card in block letters:

JOHN CABOT
1000 WILSHIRE BLVD.
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

With appropriate precautions against fingerprints, the card and forty dollars went into the tan wallet, and the wallet into Joseph Chibou's breast pocket.

"They'll waste time contacting Los Angeles."

The coins, penknife, cigarettes, matches and indelible pencil he distributed through the victim's garments. Mr. Baxitte flung everything else into the safe, and locked the safe. When he stepped, now, into the corridor he discovered the young couple in the dressing room under the stairs.

"I missed you upstairs, Leo," said he severely. "You'd better get back on the job."

The youth's job was Omar Tent's equivalent of night club photographer. He sketched the patrons' likenesses in charcoal, for a dollar the head.

"And," added Mr. Baxitte to the Ouled-Nail, "it's time we got the show started."

He went back to the office, nagged by the worry that one or the other might have seen Joseph Chibou in the corridor. In the interval Joseph Chibou had contrived to slide from the desk to the floor.

"Think you're going to start knocking around, do you?" said Mr. Baxitte.

Chibou dead on the premises had been anxiety enough; Chibou coming to his senses and crying for help was not to be thought of.

A few moments later, anyone coming down the stairs would have seen Mr. Baxitte assisting an apparently blindly intoxicated patron along the corridor. No one did, for everyone was watching Miss Ouled-Nail.

Including Leo. Leo, when Mr. Baxitte came softly upstairs, leaned in the archway and absorbedly watched

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the girl out on the dance floor. Mr. Baxitte paused for a moment and then went on into the barroom, no longer concerned with what Leo might have seen or might say.

In a little while the dancer ran downstairs breathlessly — and found breath to scream horrifyingly.

The police came.

Official cars filled the parking area along the curb. A uniformed officer replaced the burnoosed doorman, and sternly waved late arrivals on their way. Inside, a catastrophic quiet gripped the patrons who stared into their glasses at the tiny bar. Mr. Baxitte popped from the arched door, his beret at a desperately disheveled angle. "Joe," said he, and spoke whisperingly to the Irish bartender. When Joe had listened, he looked around with an effortful smile upon the Hiberian features under his Turkish fez.

"Drink up, everybody," said the barman, too jovially. "Next round's on the house."

But the words fell like election returns upon a Republican Headquarters in the State of Texas.

"You, mister," said the bartender determinedly. "What's yours?"

"A beer," murmured the tired gray man at the bar's end. "A small beer."

"Draw one short, coming up. . . . Next, sir?"

Next was a ruddy, substantial, blue-suited individual who, before he replied, had to draw from his lips the bit of a stub-stemmed briar pipe.

"Passing," said he.

Miss Ouled-Nail's bare shoulder thrust between the two men. "Scotch. Do I need it? Honestly, my knees are still shaking. Imagine! A dead man! In my dressing room!"

"In your dressing room, eh?" said the ruddy man. Shrewdly. "So the crime occurred during your number?"

Mr. Baxitte did not like the pipe-owner's tone. He looked sharply at the man, and began to wonder . . .

"There cer'n'ly wasn't any dead guy down there before," agreed Miss Ouled-Nail.

"Ah! But can you prove that?"

"Uh-huh, because before the show I was down there posing for Leo." She flung a nod in the direction of the youth who, sketch pad under arm, lounged moodily against the far wall.

"Then that narrows it down considerably," said the ruddy man. "Very considerably indeed."

What Mr. Baxitte thought was: "A cop! Great God! He was here all the time!"

But now from the arched entrance there slipped past Mr. Baxitte an eyeglassed and cowlicked chap carrying a dark valise.

"Oh, hullo, Munro," said the newcomer.

A cop, yes.

But the eyeglassed chap clapped his hand upon the weary gray man's shoulder.

Astonishment overcame Mr. Baxitte. For the shoulder was a stooped one, and Munro had much the ap-

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pearance of a newspaper cartoonist's John Q. Public. Mr. Munro was spare, and slight, and looked to Baxitte to be the sort of New Yorker who is contemptuously shoved about by subway guards.

"Find much?" said Munro.

"WM 50 or thereabouts," replied the eyeglassed man in a murmur that did not quite reach Mr. Baxitte. "Right occipital fissure fracture . . . hematoma . . . no laceration . . . crushing of the thyroid and cricoid cartilages. . . ."

He moved along past Miss Ouled-Nail, whose mascaraed lashes were widely opened.

"Holy smoke," said she, staring at Munro. "I'd cer'nly never guessed *you* were a cop."

"I.B.," said the slight, gray man diffidently. "The lab."

"But I guessed." He of the blue suit pointed his pipestem at Mr. Munro. "Because you're not the night club type. You didn't belong here — that struck me long before your coroner friend came along."

"Medical examiner," murmured Munro, smiling a gently corrective smile. "New York City's not had coroners since 1918. You'll sometimes hear the date given as '15, but that's when the legislation was passed. It took nearly three years before the Office of Chief Medical Examiner began to function. Then came Essex County, New Jersey — Newark, you know — in '27, Nassau County in '38, and, the next year, the State of Maryland."

Mr. Baxitte stared, for these dry statistics had brought a warming color to Munro's gray cheeks.

"I'm from St. Paul, Minn., myself," said the ruddy individual. "Anyway — coroner, medical examiner, it's all the same thing."

"Is it?" murmured Munro. "I wonder if you'd say so if you knew what the word coroner really means?"

Mr. Baxitte, Miss Ouled-Nail, and the visitor from St. Paul were equally blank-faced.

"He was the Crown's man, in medieval days," said Munro enlighteningly, "and he had nothing to do with sudden and violent death. It was the coroner's job to see to it the king got his divvy when anyone dug up a buried treasure. Like Topsy, he just growed into a homicide investigator — without rhyme or reason or specialized training. It may shock you to hear that even today, in a good many parts of the U.S.A., the coroner needn't legally be, and isn't, a qualified physician."

There followed a silence during which two of Munro's audience looked, not shocked, but nonplussed. But Mr. Baxitte had begun to smile.

Munro was clearly a crank, a pedant, and a longhair.

"I'm not critizing the individual coroner," Munro was saying. "The job shouldn't be an elective, political plum. The trained, Civil Service medical examiner is the ticket for what's an extremely tricky, technical business."

The ruddy man chuckled. "Sure.

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You New Yorkers are the same as everybody else. *Your* way is best — local pride."

Munro's expression became meditative. "It's true," said he, "Massachusetts had the *first* medical examiners. Started in 1877. But they were never an independent agency, and I do feel New York's entitled to —"

Mr. Baxitte turned away, and all but bumped into two hurrying young women. Mr. Baxitte's eyes followed their slender figures to the arched opening.

"Not bad," said the visitor from St. Paul, and nudged Mr. Baxitte.

"The redhead, especially," said the latter.

"They've an interesting history," Munro observed. "Several cities have claimed the credit, out of local pride as you say. But it seems that Portland, Oregon, in 1905, employed the first policewomen."

"Policewomen!" The Minnesotan, several degrees ruddier, puffed a hasty smokescreen. Miss Ouled-Nail giggled — and felt an unobtrusive hand close upon her arm.

"I expect you'd as soon get it over with," Munro said. "Come along, Miss."

The plainclothes policewomen turned downstairs. Munro and the girl followed. Mr. Baxitte tagged behind.

In the corridor below, the doorman, with his burnoose hood flung back upon his shoulders, was being questioned by stocky, cigar-chewing Detective-Lieutenant Rydor.

"They don't generally walk out during the floor show," the burnoosed man said. "I'd noticed, if anyone had."

The lieutenant turned to the policewomen. Mr. Baxitte listened earnestly. Lieutenant Rydor was no longhaired theorist. He was, on the contrary, a bald, grim, and coldly practical man.

"The guy was sapped first, and strangled afterward," said the stocky lieutenant. "We've not found the blackjack, and his wallet was taken. It looks like perhaps the killer didn't get away before the alarm. So the first order of business is a general shakedown, commencing with the employees."

"I resent that crack!" cried Miss Ouled-Nail.

Midway down the stair, Mr. Baxitte said hotly, "*You* resent it? How do you suppose my paying customers will fancy being suspected of jack-rolling a corpse? Of course, the employees have to be searched first!"

Resentfully, nonetheless, the dancer accompanied the policewomen into the office. Lieutenant Rydor thrust his cigar into a sand urn and, with Munro, turned to the dressing room under the stairwell. The photographer was just now unscrewing his camera from its tilt-top tripod. A white-hot floodlamp beat upon the White Male, 50-ish object that had been Joseph Chibou. A Nylon of the Ouled-Nail's, snatched from a chairback, had been knotted about his throat.

"You'd better pull his prints,

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Munro. If he carried any other identification, I can't find it."

"I'd better have a fingernail scraping first," said Munro in that scientifically dispassionate tone which is of all tones the most peremptory. Munro was all business, and remained silently so, until he looked up from the eyepiece of a lab-kit microscope:

"Our chap's had his hands in flour and molasses."

Mr. Baxitte overheard, and felt his knee-joints melt. Flour and molasses are used in picture restoration; these clues aimed straight to Voicsin's, among the handful of studios where such work was done; Munro had put the case into Lieutenant Rydor's brawny fingers.

"Flour? Molasses?" echoed the lieutenant. "Okay, we'll check with the bakery workers' union. It's a break if he belongs to one of the locals."

Mr. Baxitte could breathe again. He retreated to the head of the stairs. Rydor marched into the phone booth. In the dressing room Munro deftly worked to transfer the victim's fingerprints with an inking roller and a hollowed paper-receptacle. The I.B. man had only barely completed this task when there came a startled shout.

"*I* nailed him!" cried a brusquely aggressive voice. "Red-handed, trying to chuck it!"

Mr. Baxitte spun around. A racketing rush of footfalls brought Lieutenant Rydor up the steps. By the time Munro arrived, Leo stood pallid and trapped between a police officer and the ruddy visitor from St. Paul.

"I was watching in the bar mirror," said the Minnesotan, "and I saw him take this out of his pocket and shy it off into the corner."

Lieutenant Rydor snatched the tan billfold.

"I don't know how it got into my coat," said Leo ashenly. "I didn't put it there."

"Why'd you throw it away?"

"I reached into my pocket — for cigarettes — and a thing like that — I was scared —"

Miss Ouled-Nail, released by the policewomen, came up the stairs, gave a shocked cry, and sprang into the tableau.

"Leo! Darling!"

Mr. Baxitte found it all very much more satisfactory than if the wallet had simply been found in Leo's coat.

It was necessary for the lieutenant to detach the girl's arms from about Leo. Meanwhile, Munro had taken the wallet by its edges, and given its contents a gray, quizzical glance. Munro stepped through the street pavilion to a headquarters' car at the curb.

"Here," said he to the camera technician, "photograph this. With Ermel's solution. Check the prints. And hustle."

The car roared away. So, a little while later, did another in which rode the lieutenant and his incoherent prisoner.

Within Omar's Tent, Mr. Baxitte's suddenly tranquil countenance beamed at the barman. "We'll close out of respect for the dead," said he.

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"Nightcaps for everybody first, though."

"As a matter of fact," murmured Munro, touching the ruddy man's sleeve, "Mr. — I don't think I got your name."

"O'Shawn."

"Mr. O'Shawn, I feel the drinks are on me."

From the tail of his eye Mr. Baxitte discovered the Ouled-Nail's tear-and-mascara streaked face. "Leo didn't — " she began.

Mr. Baxitte interposed himself firmly.

"Nonsense," said Mr. Baxitte, and grasped the two men's arms. "Tell you what, we'll open a magnum of champagne downstairs."

And to the girl:

"What you want's a sleeping powder, and you'll feel better in the morning."

"Hard on the little lady," said O'Shawn, in the office below. "I pity her."

Pity, in Mr. Baxitte's view, was a Dangerous Thought. "Money's been missed here before. She's lucky to find him out in time."

But the drawing of the magnum's cork occurred in a constrained silence.

"Blast it," said the ruddy man. "I don't feel like *celebrating*."

What Mr. Baxitte thought was: "You'd like to listen to her, play detective, and go trying to pin the thing on somebody else."

The question was how to detain O'Shawn without offending the witness who had seen Leo in the mirror.

Munro raised his glass.

"To St. Paul! I was in your city some years ago, attending an I.A.C.P. convention."

"I'm an Elk myself," said the ruddy man absently.

"The I.A.C.P. is the International Association of Chiefs of Police — not that I'm a chief — I was asked to deliver a lecture. I don't know whether you realize the I.A.C.P. is one of our oldest crime-combatting organizations? It dates back to 1871, though the conventions weren't held annually until the idea was revived in connection with the Chicago World Fair of '93."

Munro was off, and luckily for Mr. Baxitte, who could barely help laughing in the stooped, gray man's face.

"It was a long while ago, when you stop to think how brief the history of modern law enforcement is. George Washington didn't know what a *detective* was; why, the word wasn't coined until Tyler's Administration. And as for most of our enforcement agencies — well," said Munro enthusiastically, "I don't suppose you were ever picked up trying to smuggle some little article in after a vacation in Mexico or Canada?"

"Good God," said the ruddy man, "no."

"If you had been, you could thank the U. S. Customs Patrol, Treasury Department — the successors to the Mounted Inspectors who started riding border patrol back in 1886."

Munro was warming to his theme.

"If the charge was illegal entry,

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you'd be nabbed by the Immigration Border Patrol, which began to function in 1925. It's astounding, the number of specialized enforcement agencies! Isn't it?"

The visitor from St. Paul sighed, "All right! Okay! You know your stuff. I'm just an amateur — all I know about the cops is that they hand out parking tickets."

Mr. Baxitte knew that he had won. Or rather, Munro had won for him. For O'Shawn's inclination to play amateur sleuth had withered under the I.B. man's machine-gun statistics.

"Another New York first. The original traffic squad was assembled here in 1903," Munro responded. "Shall we have another little drink on that?"

Mr. Baxitte could not decently refuse.

"The squad grew to 500 officers in the first two years. And now, do you know, the I.A.C.P. recommends assigning one cop in every four to traffic duty? But it's not my field, of course. That lecture of mine in St. Paul had to do with the lie detector."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Baxitte, a dozen impatient glances at his wristwatch later. "Well. We've closed upstairs, you know."

"Time for another toast, surely," the I.B. man estimated cheerily. "St. Paul, New York — who's next? We might drink to Boston. Do you know that a Boston shoemaker named John Augustus, away back in 1848, became the first volunteer parole officer?"

The shot told. It told Mr. Baxitte that the police, once they had classified Chibou's fingerprints, would get from the parole authorities the address on 135th Street. Why hadn't he thought of it before?

"Or Pennsylvania," murmured Munro. "Their State Constabulary was the first modernized state trooper outfit."

Mr. Baxitte thought of the Abbey picture owner, and the dealer's name, that Joseph Chibou had written down in his room. He reflected that Chibou had looked up *his* name and the Omar Tent address, and maybe had these written down, also.

"*I'm sorry, but* —"

"Then again, there were the Texas Rangers, 1835," suggested Munro. "A toast to the rangers — where's your red blood, men?"

Mr. Baxitte's blood hammered hard in his temples. "I have to tote up the night's receipts, you know," he said desperately.

"But the night's young," cried Munro, twinkling. Mr. Baxitte breathed hard, through his teeth.

"I'm afraid we're boring Mr. O'Shawn," he managed.

The ruddy man grinned. "No, I'm getting fascinated."

"Mustn't forget the romantic Bow Street runner, Sir Robert Peel's bobbies, and François Eugène Vidocq, first detective to write a bestseller —"

The desk phone rang. "Hello, yes," said Munro.

Mr. Baxitte backed toward the safe in the corner while the I.B. man

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listened. Munro put down the phone:

"O'Shawn, may I see your billfold?"

Somewhat gingerly, the visitor from St. Paul surrendered a pigskin case. Munro ran a gray glance into its interior. "Yes, in the whole history of crime detection, no cop ever shook down a legitimate citizen whose wallet wasn't like this. Here you've the family snapshots, two old theater stubs, several parking lot claim checks —"

"Excuse me. Business matter," babbled Mr. Baxitte, whose fingers were skidding sweatily over the safe dial.

"— the various traces a cop expects. Too clean a wallet is suspicious. A wallet without *any* personal traces may have been supplied, not by the victim, but by the murderer."

What Mr. Baxitte thought was: "He can't prove it. The longhair can't *prove* it."

Munro thumbed deeper into the ruddy man's billfold. "You've a hotel association credit card, insurance card, and a lodge membership. Your name is written on each, in ink, and I daresay had only freshly been written when these cards were tucked into your billfold, O'Shawn?"

"I guess so."

Munro had quite cast off his normally tired gray look.

"Ink's a fascinating fluid, scientifically considered," said he beaming. "It ionizes. It suffuses chlorides and sulphates through the surrounding paper. It will even impress latent and invisible traces upon receptive surfaces with which it comes in contact. If we were to take apart this wallet, and treat it with Ermel's solution of nitric, citric, and tartaric acids in silver nitrate, we should obtain photographable ghosts of your name where the writing lay directly against the leather."

And the I.B. man looked around. "*Just as the lab found Baxitte's name in that other wallet!*"

Mr. Baxitte spun wildly from his opened safe.

"A bag half-filled with coins makes a nasty blackjack," said Munro, "but you'd best not try. You'd only meet Rydor coming in the door."

In fact, Lieutenant Rydor was coming in the door. Mr. Baxitte's arm and the pouch fell lamely.

When they marched him upstairs, two figures drew apart in the pavilioned entrance.

"Okay, Leo, take her home," said Rydor.

But Miss Ouled-Nail came up to Munro. "I'd like to ask a question."

"If you can stump him," said O'Shawn hoarsely, "I'll buy everybody champagne."

"What I want to know is how did you cops manage, like tonight, before policewomen were invented?"

Munro knew the answer.

"If you allude to the searching of females," said the stooped, spare man mechanically, "you may put your imagination at ease. The records indicate that the City has employed police matrons since 1846."

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THE MICROSCOPE OF JUDGMENT

About the author of "The Missing Motive" we know only two things: that his name, Kenneth Livingston, is more an abbreviated name than it is a pseudonym — his full, true name being Kenneth Livingston Stewart; and that to the best of our knowledge and records, the only book Mr. Livingston has had published in the United States is the one from which we selected "The Missing Motive" — THE DODD CASES *(Doubleday, Doran, 1934). We are fortunate to have the American edition of* THE DODD CASES *in the original dust-wrapper, so we can quote the publisher's comments on Mr. Livingston's detective. Dr. Cedric Dodd (says the publisher) "is no magician, no dabbler in laboratories, nor is he an expert in Ming vases. His forte is common sense rather than chemistry, and his triumphs are achieved by a capacity to grasp the significance of obvious details which others have ignored." So far, your Editor nods his head in complete agreement. "Perhaps the outstanding feature of Kenneth Livingston's work (the publisher goes on) is that it more closely approximates the flavor and atmosphere of the Sherlock Holmes stories than does the work of any other present-day writer of mystery fiction. In reading this book one has the uncanny feeling that Baker Street, Watson, Moriarity [sic] and Holmes have been reincarnated in the guise of Cedric Dodd and his able [sic] assistant."*

With the last quotation from the publisher's blurb we are in complete disagreement. The Dodd Cases do not closely approximate the flavor and atmosphere of the Sherlock Holmes stories. We can't help wondering if the blurb-writer bothered to read Mr. Livingston's book — oh, yes, it has been known to happen: many a blurb (and for that matter, many a review) has been written by a blurb-writer (or critic) who has not read the book which he has been assigned to promote (or review). Involved, we grant, but you know what we mean. If, however, the blurb-writer did read THE DODD CASES, *then we are compelled to ask: did that blurb-writer ever read Sherlock Holmes?*

In any event, "The Missing Motive" is a first-rate story of its kind — strictly English, although not strictly Holmesian. And that brings us to the second curious difference of opinion that we have on Mr. Livingston's story — this time, with the English publisher.

The American edition of THE DODD CASES *contains seven stories. The English edition of* THE DODD CASES *(Methuen, 1933) contains only*

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six stories. Which story did the English publisher choose not to include? The story we now offer you — "The Missing Motive." Why did the English publisher omit this particular story? — which happened to be, according to Mr. Livingston, the case in which Dr. Cedric Dodd "discovered such talents" as he possessed: "that is to say . . . my last medical and first detective case" — the one that "led to my abandoning medical for detective work." We can only assume, since the English edition appeared one year ahead of the American, that the British publisher did not consider "The Missing Motive" a good enough story to include in their book.

Strange indeed, this matter of editorial opinion . . . In our opinion, "The Missing Motive" is by far the best of the seven Dodd cases. None of the six stories in the English edition holds a candle to it. As Dr. Sam: Johnson once wrote: "The wild vicissitudes of taste" . . .

THE MISSING MOTIVE

by KENNETH LIVINGSTON

AT ABOUT half-past five one summer afternoon Cedric Dodd, M.D., general practitioner of Medworth, received an urgent summons to attend a new patient at a house only a few doors from his own and but recently occupied. Being disengaged at the moment — as a matter of fact, he was in the middle of a late tea — he lost no time in obeying the call, and on arrival was admitted by a maid-servant, who showed him into the drawing room. Here he was joined a moment or two later by the mistress of the house, who introduced herself, somewhat agitatedly, as Mrs. Gordon Score. She was an exceedingly pretty girl, probably still on the right side of thirty, with a low, rather monotonous but oddly enchanting voice.

Mrs. Gordon Score proceeded to inform Dodd that her husband had been taken suddenly ill, and to give him, very rapidly and efficiently, he said, such details as were immediately necessary for an understanding of the case. It appeared that he had returned from his office, just before five, drunk a cup of tea and eaten a couple of biscuits, and almost at once fallen violently sick. Thinking it no more than an ordinary if somewhat acute bilious attack, she had at first contented herself with getting him to bed and giving him a hot-water bottle, but as he was obviously still in considerable pain and the symptoms showed little signs of abating, she had thought a doctor advisable.

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She then conducted Dodd to the bedroom door and discreetly retired.

The patient proved to be a man of about forty: a shy, pleasant fellow of the nervous, artistic type that makes up in mental ability for what it lacks in physical strength. He appeared to be suffering from severe abdominal pains, with symptoms of an unpleasant nature pointing unquestionably to a severe attack of a trouble that was very prevalent that summer — gastro-enteritis, at that time generally known to the man in the street as English cholera. Dodd did what was necessary, prescribed an alleviating mixture, and took his departure, warning Mrs. Score to give him a ring if there were no signs of improvement before long.

That was, as I have said, at six o'clock, and before eight the unfortunate man was dead. Naturally, it was a considerable shock to Dodd when, revisiting the house in response to a second summons, he was met at the door by the almost distracted wife, who informed him that she feared her husband had "gone."

Her fears turned out to have been only too well founded. The shortest examination of the body was sufficient to show that life was extinct. Dodd gathered that after his departure the attack had at first increased in violence; but just as she was about to summon him again the symptoms, as she thought, perceptibly abated. She attributed this to the beneficial effect of the medicine, but in point of fact, as any doctor would have had little difficulty in discerning, what she took for signs of improvement were in reality exactly the reverse; the patient's heart, probably never very strong, had collapsed under the strain, and in a short time death ensued from heart failure.

In view of the young widow's obvious distress, Dodd did nothing that evening beyond offering what verbal consolation he could and sending in the necessary help. But meanwhile, he told me, he had plenty to think about. In all illnesses there is, of course, a certain amount of risk, particularly in those which place an undue strain upon the heart; so that the possibility of sudden death is never altogether absent from a doctor's calculations. But in this case he had certainly anticipated no such sudden crisis; nor had he hitherto known a case of gastro-enteritis to terminate fatally upon the first day. Indeed, the more he thought over the affair — and he said that he thought of nothing else for the rest of the evening and the greater part of the night — the less did he like the look of it; and before morning he had made up his mind to withhold the certificate of death usually granted in such cases until further enquiry had been made.

On the following morning, a Saturday, the widow appeared more composed, and Dodd was able to venture a few discreet questions; and partly in consequence of what he then learned, but more, as he admitted, "to be on the safe side than anything else," he

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ordered a post-mortem examination. From this, and from a subsequent chemical analysis of certain organs then removed, it appeared in due course that Gordon Score's body had contained at the time of death sufficient arsenic to point to the administration of a large fatal dose, such as would cause death within a few hours from acute arsenical poisoning.

Shortly afterwards an inquest on the body was commenced, and, as usually happens, promptly adjourned for a week. Meanwhile the local police, under the direction of Inspector Gilbert, were pursuing enquiries in various quarters, and it was in the course of these enquiries that Gilbert and Dodd came together. They were already old chess adversaries, both being members of the local club; but chess is a game of few words, and I doubt if they would have exchanged more than a dozen sentences with each other before the Score case brought them into mutual contact. On that occasion Cedric Dodd no doubt received the inspector with his accustomed courtesy and hospitality, freely placing at his disposal what little he knew of the matter as follows:

Facts elicited from the patient.

(1) No history of previous attacks of gastro-enteritis, poisoning, etc.

(2) On the day of the death he had arisen as usual, breakfasted, caught his usual train to the office; lunched at 1:15 at Pym's in Bishopsgate; caught the 4:20 train home, arriving at 5; had a cup of tea and two biscuits; and had been taken ill about ten or fifteen minutes later.

(3) Particulars of meals given. These included nothing suspicious on the face of it; no tinned articles, no fish.

Facts elicited from the widow.

(1) Confirmation of deceased's statement as to absence of previous attacks.

(2) Confirmation as to tea and biscuits taken on arriving home.

(3) Deceased had died intestate, leaving the widow and two children "him surviving," as the lawyers say; also a third child due in seven months' time.

As to financial position, widow stated that they had been living on income resulting from the practice of deceased's profession, and she did not think they had saved. Deceased's life insured for £2,000.

(4) No motive for suicide within the widow's knowledge.

(5) Before the final collapse and loss of consciousness, during a momentary remission of pain, he had made an abrupt gesture, "as if suddenly realizing something," at the same time remarking, half to himself: "Of course! It was the biscuits!"

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Nothing very much passed between Dodd and Gilbert at this first interview, but shortly afterwards they met in the street, and Dodd stopped the inspector to ask how the investigation was proceeding. The inspector smiled wryly.

"Well, you know, Dr. Dodd," he said, "I'm not supposed to give official secrets away, even to you. But as a matter of fact I can't, because there aren't any to give. Of course, it's early days yet, and something or other may turn up; but if I don't get a move on soon in one direction or another, I shall have them badgering me to call in Scotland Yard, and then ——"

"Bang goes your chance," said Dodd.

"Exactly," said Inspector Gilbert.

"What about that matter of the biscuits?" Dodd asked. "You've looked into that, of course."

"Yes. We've had 'em analyzed — every one that was left. Wouldn't hurt a baby. No more arsenic in them than there is in my hat. But I've gone further than that. As a matter of fact, they weren't the only biscuits he had that day, for he had some at the office."

"Oho!" said Dodd.

"Exactly," said Inspector Gilbert again, "that's just what I said. But I collared the whole tin that was left, and there was nothing the matter with one of 'em."

"How did he come to eat biscuits in the office?"

"He always did. Always had a cup of tea and a couple of biscuits in the office before starting for home — most business men do; and if he found tea still going when he got home, he had another cup, just to keep 'em company, so to speak."

Dodd considered this for a moment in silence. "I see," he said. "Anything else? What about suicide? Have you thought of that at all?"

The inspector shook his head.

"No," he said. "I'm pretty well convinced that there's nothing doing in that line. People don't usually commit suicide by burning their innards out with poison."

"Unless it's fraudulent suicide," Dodd put in. "Don't forget there's always the possibility of that."

The inspector smiled. "Not in this case, Dr. Dodd," he said. "And I'll tell you why. There was an insurance policy, true enough, but —" and here the speaker's voice betrayed his appreciation of the minor triumph — "it had been surrendered."

"Phew!" Dodd whistled. "That's nasty. Then the girl doesn't get her insurance?"

"Unfortunately, no. And she's left pretty badly off, too, I hear."

Dodd shook his head sympathetically. "That's always the way with these business people when they go off suddenly," he said. "However, it does seem to rule out the suicide theory pretty conclusively. And what about this office of his? Anything fishy there?"

The inspector shook his head gloomily. "Not a mortal thing, so far.

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Good firm. Nice people. Three other partners; very upset; did all they could to help. Of course, I haven't done with them yet; but if one of them is a murderer, I — well, I shall be surprised."

"All the partners get on well together?"

Inspector Gilbert hesitated. "Well, I suppose there is no harm in my mentioning it to you, particularly since I attach very little importance to it," he said. "But, as a matter of fact, I did, by dint of much questioning, unearth the fact that there had been disagreements between deceased and the senior partner. But he's a nice old boy, the senior, I mean, and the others were very loath to mention it and very careful to point out that they hardly amounted to anything at all."

"What sort of disagreements?" Dodd asked.

"Very trivial ones. Poky little points connected with office routine, the sort of silly little quarrels, hardly worthy of the name, that are bound to crop up from time to time between two partners who are both quick-tempered and both want their own way. Each accused the other of collaring his pet typist; the old man liked to keep plenty of cash at the bank, and young Score liked to draw it out sooner; if one wanted to increase the staff, t'other didn't; and so forth and so on. There's no motive for murder there; and both the others assured me that on the whole they all got on remarkably well, and I hardly suppose they are all in a conspiracy of silence together."

"Have you looked for the proverbially inevitable female? What about the girls there?"

The inspector smiled. "Go and take a look at 'em," he said. "And if you find one for whose *beaux yeux* any man would even quarrel with another, let alone murder him, I'll give you the biscuit."

"Not a poisoned one, I hope," said Dodd. "Well, good-bye. If you find yourself at a loss," he added jokingly, "call me in, and I'll take a day off and clear the little matter up for you. I've always felt I'd like to have a cut at that sort of thing. So long!"

For three days more Cedric Dodd heard nothing further of the Score affair, but on the evening of the fourth, which happened to be a Saturday, he chanced to look in at the Chess Club for an hour or so; and towards the end of his third game, glancing up for a moment from the enticements of a gloriously complicated position, he noticed that Inspector Gilbert had unobtrusively taken a place among the onlookers.

"Hulloa, Gilbert," he said, "another ten minutes and I'll give you a game."

He was as good as his word, for eight minutes later he asked for and obtained a draw; but the inspector, instead of taking the vacated seat opposite Dodd, crossed over to his side of the table.

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"As a matter of fact," he said apologetically, "I didn't come here for a game tonight."

"Then I can only presume," said Dodd with a grin, "that you came to look for me."

"I did," said the inspector grimly. "And I should rather like to have a word or two with you, if you can spare the time." And stooping lower he whispered in Dodd's ear the two words, "Re Score."

Dodd rose with alacrity. "Come along," he said quietly. "My room, my whisky, my cigars, and my company are at your service."

It was not difficult to see that the inspector was in a state of considerable excitement, and hardly had he taken his seat in Dodd's study when, without even stopping to sample the drink that had been placed on a table at his elbow, he burst out, "I've made a discovery."

"The dickens you have," said Dodd, settling himself down with interest. "Well, I presume, since you are here, that you intend me to share it."

"You see, Mr. Dodd," the inspector went on, "I've taken you at your word. You told me, if I was in difficulties, to come to you; and I am; so I have."

"You've struck oil, then?"

"I have," said the inspector. "More than I want, in a way. When I last saw you, the case was at a standstill. As I told you, I was loath to call in help; and since no definite line of enquiry presented itself, I determined to explore any and every avenue at random. Well, to cut a long story short, I began by thoroughly searching the Bishopsgate office."

He paused to refresh himself from the glass at his elbow.

"I say 'thoroughly searching,'" he proceeded slowly, "but in point of fact I didn't have to look very far. On the desk of the senior partner — mind you, not in — but *on* the desk of the senior partner, Mr. Everard Ellison, I noticed two fairly small-sized bottles. One contained tablets of bisurated magnesia; the other had presumably contained them, but was empty. There was no attempt at concealment; there they were staring me and him in the face. Well, I had both bottles examined and analyzed; the Bismag tablets gave no results, but the empty bottle, on the inside of which there was a faint brown stain, was found to have contained a strong solution of arsenic."

Dodd nodded.

"Such as might be poured into a cup of tea?" he asked softly.

"Yes. That's, of course, what occurred to me. It looks, on the face of it, as if this solution of arsenic had been deliberately and carefully prepared, say from arsenical flypapers — which would account for the brown stains — brought to the office in this convenient bottle, and just tipped into the deceased's cup of tea."

"Probably after the tipper had drunk a little of the tea to make room," put in Dodd.

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For a moment the two contemplated the picture thus sketched in silence. The inspector was the first to speak.

"It certainly looks ugly," he said.

Dodd regarded him curiously.

"Against ——?" he asked.

The inspector smiled. "Oh, of course, I've seen that point all right," he said. "Against one of the other two, naturally. The presence of the bottle on old Everard Thingumtight's desk practically exonerates him. I know murderers are notoriously slapdash about little points like that, but I hardly think he would have been quite so foolish as to place the bottle in a conspicuous position on his own desk. No; it certainly looks as if someone else had put it there, presumably in the hope of throwing suspicion on him. Of course, I examined the bottle for fingerprints, but there were none; no doubt the murderer was fly enough to carry it wrapped up."

"Rather crude," said Dodd, "to try and incriminate the old boy by planking the thing down right on top of his desk. I should have thought it would at least be put inside."

"Very crude, I quite agree. And yet there you are. Someone put the bottle there, and that someone must have been the guilty party; and if you are going to say that it wasn't Ellison because he wouldn't have left the bottle on his own desk, and it wasn't anyone else because such an attempt to avert suspicion is too crude to be entertained, then you are left with the conclusion that nobody put the bottle there at all — which is absurd!"

"It certainly is a peculiar point," said Dodd reflectively. "Anyway, what sort of people are these other partners?"

"Well, as a matter of fact," Inspector Gilbert explained, "one of them, Watchett, can almost certainly be excluded at once, because he sits in the other room. The deceased, Ellison, and the remaining man, Rigby, sat together. Rigby is about the same age as the deceased, a very pleasant-spoken, open, and I should say quite sincere sort of fellow."

"And what explanation did Ellison give of the presence of the bottle on his desk?" Dodd asked.

"None," said the inspector, "because I didn't ask him. You see, when I first spotted the bottle I didn't make a song about it. I just bought a couple more — you can buy Bismag at any chemist's — emptied one, half-emptied the other, and exchanged the new ones for the old when the partners were out at lunch."

"I see," said Dodd. "Or rather, I don't quite. What was the idea of that?"

Inspector Gilbert winked. "Just sheer caution and low cunning, at first," he said. "But it proved very useful afterwards. You see, it gave me a chance, once I knew what had been in the empty bottle, to try a few tricks. For example, I made a great point of picking it up, first in full view of Ellison and then of Rigby."

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Again Dodd nodded approvingly. "Any rise?" he asked.

"Not a sign. Not a mortal sign. They just loved it. 'By Jove!' says Rigby — I tried him first — 'you don't think ——?' 'Ah, sir,' I said, 'in a case like this one never knows.' As for Ellison, the old rascal, the moment I picked it up — it was after lunch on the day the real bottles were analyzed — he smiles as innocently as you please, whips up the half-full bottle, and, 'Thank you, Inspector,' he says in his courtly, venerable-ambassador style, 'you've reminded me to take my dose,' and he swallows a couple then and there. Of course, I had to make a show of alarm, though I knew they were all right, as I'd put 'em there myself. 'Don't you worry about them,' he says, 'there's nothing wrong with them, for I've been taking them every day.' 'And what about this, sir?' I asked him, picking up the empty bottle (which had the faintest brown stain, just like the original, though you can't see much of it because there's paper all over the front). 'Oh,' he says, hardly glancing at it, 'I expect that's one of my empties. I get through a lot of this stuff, you know. They get all over the place. I dare say you'll find some more in my desk if you look carefully.' "

"Hm!" said Dodd. "So that's that."

"Moreover," added the inspector, "just to make quite sure, I dropped a casual question to Rigby about the Bismag, to make sure old Ellison really did take it regularly. And he does."

Cedric Dodd replenished the empty glasses. "Anything else?" he asked.

The inspector made a gesture of helplessness. "Nothing at all," he said.

"And why," asked Dodd, "have you told me all this?"

The inspector hesitated. "Well, sir," he said at last, "this is why: I've done all I can. I've got so far — and I can get no further. You see, we can't afford to waste time. I must either chuck the case and call in Scotland Yard, or ——" He broke off.

"Or call in unofficial and unauthorized help," Dodd supplied the omission.

"Exactly," the inspector agreed.

"And as," Dodd pursued, "you prefer the devil you know to the devil you don't know, you thought you'd let me have a shot at it."

"You asked for it, you know," the inspector put in with a sly smile.

"I did," Dodd agreed. "And I'll tell you what I'll do. Give me a day or two to think things over and make a few enquiries on my own account, and on Monday, or Tuesday at latest, I'll lay my cards on the table. And meanwhile, to allay any doubts you may have as to whether you are justified in wasting this further time, I'll admit to you now that I think I have got a card or two up my sleeve. In fact, I'll go further; I'll confess to you that I am impudent enough to believe that I have spotted one or two rather significant points that seem to have escaped your astute mind."

The inspector rose with a sigh.

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"If you can tell me who poisoned Gordon Score," he said, "and above all, *why*, I'll — " he paused — "I'll be your devoted servant for life," he finished lamely.

Cedric Dodd laughed. "Thanks very much," he said. "Well, until Monday or Tuesday, then; and meanwhile I'll see what I can do."

On the Monday morning Inspector Gilbert received a telephone call from Cedric Dodd. "Don't get excited," he said. "I've still got one day left, and I'm making no startling revelations just yet. But I want to have a look at that Bishopsgate office; and as you have the entrée, I think you'd better take me there. Can you arrange to catch the 10:05? That'll be late enough to dodge the business men and early enough to give us a good long morning."

Accordingly, at ten o'clock the two men met on the up platform of Medworth Station. Inspector Gilbert had hoped to pick up a hint or two as to the progress of Dodd's investigations, but as soon as they were comfortably ensconced in an empty first-class compartment, Dodd produced from his pocket a travelling chess set, and for the rest of the journey no further word was spoken save the monosyllabic ejaculations occasioned by that least sociable of games. Not until they were crawling into Cannon Street Station did Dodd close the board, and he was still discussing the possibilities of the inspector's irregular "opening" when, ten minutes later, the two ascended to their destination on the fourth floor of a block of offices in Bishopsgate.

They found the place in the full swing of a busy morning. In the outer office clerks were hurrying to and fro, telephone bells were ringing, and big books being slammed about; while from a further room at the back came the perpetual click and clatter of typewriters. Almost at once a natty youth, recognizing the inspector, hurried forward to conduct them with every sign of awe to the inner office usually occupied by two of the three surviving partners — a large book-lined room, well furnished as offices go, and containing a round table in the centre and three roll-top desks in corners — where they were received by a youngish man with grey hair whom Dodd had no difficulty in recognizing as Mr. Rigby. Inspector Gilbert introduced Dodd smoothly if somewhat ambiguously as "a collaborator," omitting his title of "Doctor," and explaining that they wished to make a few enquiries in connection with the death of the late Mr. Gordon Score.

"Certainly," said Mr. Rigby soberly, motioning them into chairs. "I am quite sure that everyone here will be only too glad to give any assistance they can. Is there anyone you would particularly like to see?"

Dodd, with a quick glance round, took a seat in the proffered chair.

"First of all," he said briskly, "I should like to have a look at the firm's present partnership deed."

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Mr. Rigby seemed a little surprised. "Oh, yes, I can soon show you that," he said; and opening a safe in a corner he produced a document engrossed on parchment. This he handed to Dodd, who read it slowly and carefully, and then in turn handed it to the inspector.

"You will see," said Dodd, with a glance at Rigby as if for confirmation, "that the partners under that deed shared the profits of the business in the proportions of forty, thirty, twenty, and ten per cent, with the proviso that upon the death of any one of them the survivors are thenceforth to share equally."

"That is so," said Rigby uneasily. "Hitherto, Mr. Ellison, being the senior, has taken the most, Mr. Watchett comes next, I take twenty per cent, and Score, being the last admitted, ten." He paused for a moment, and then added, with an awkward attempt at a smile: "So that I am the one who benefits most by Score's death."

Dodd nodded. His manner had undergone a marked change. There was a subdued excitement in his voice when he next spoke. "And now, Mr. Rigby," he said, "if you can spare me a minute or two, I should like you to tell me in your own words everything you can recall about that little meal taken here by your partner on the day of his death. I want every detail you can think of, no matter how apparently trivial and unimportant it may be."

Mr. Rigby considered for a moment, gently swinging to and fro the while in his revolving office chair.

"Really," he said at last, "I'm afraid I can recall almost nothing. You see we have tea here every day — just a cup of tea and a couple of biscuits. The tea is made in the outer office and brought to us in our rooms."

"Who makes it?"

"At present Miss Howard."

"Thank you. I'd like a word with her presently. Now as regards the biscuits — I understand they are mixed biscuits?"

"Yes. They just take them more or less as they come."

"Then you don't all have the same kind of biscuits?"

"No. As I say, we have them just as they happen to come."

"And is there anything else you can think of? Who takes sugar, for example?"

"We all do." He smiled. "Particularly Mr. Ellison, who likes four or five lumps in his tea. In fact, I'm afraid we are all rather fussy about our tea; Ellison likes it very sweet and fairly weak; I like it not so sweet and not too strong; and poor Score used to like it not too sweet and very strong. The only one who drinks what he is given without complaint is Watchett, in the next room."

Dodd smiled.

"I see," he said. "I shall expect to find Miss Howard an expert tea maker, if she has learned how to satisfy the requirements of such very particular people."

It was Rigby's turn to smile.

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"Take my advice and don't mention it," he said. "It's a sore point. The girl's not been on the job very long, and she found it a little difficult to grasp the various tastes involved. As a matter of fact, she's only a kid, sixteen or so, but she's a big girl, and so one expects more of her."

"You mean she used to give strong tea to the weak-tea man, and so forth?" Dodd asked. "And that led to trouble?"

Rigby made a gesture of deprecation. "I wouldn't go so far as that. Nothing serious, you know. But she's had a wigging or two on the subject, and so, as I say, it's a sore point."

"Thank you. And now may I have a word with her?"

"Certainly." Mr. Rigby pressed a bell on his desk and in a moment or two a tall girl clad in a green overall entered awkwardly. Her obvious shyness, something vaguely childish in the way she wore her clothes, and the nervous smile with which she acknowledged Dodd's "Good-morning," showed her to be still in the gawky stages of adolescence.

"Sit down a moment please, Miss Howard," said Mr. Rigby, pushing forward a chair. "These gentlemen wish to ask you a few questions."

The girl sat down at once and turned a pair of large round eyes upon the visitors. Dodd returned her gaze for a moment before speaking.

"I want you to carry your mind back to last Friday fortnight, the last day Mr. Score was at the office," he said.

At the mention of her dead employer's name a frightened look came into the girl's eyes.

"Yes, sir," she said.

"You made the tea that day?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what did you do with it?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Oh, come," Dodd smiled, "you don't tell me that you went to the trouble of making tea and then did nothing with it."

A slow answering smile spread over the girl's face.

"No, sir. I took it in to the partners."

With infinite patience Dodd, to the bewilderment of his audience, made her describe every stage in the simple process of distributing the cups of tea; asked what kind of biscuits they were accustomed to have in the office; inspected a large tin of mixed biscuits which she stated to be similar to those removed by the police; enquired whether she remembered what kind of biscuit she had given to each partner on that particular day — which of course she did not; and even made her corroborate Mr. Rigby's evidence as to the different strengths of tea preferred by her various employers.

"And now," he proceeded, "just tell me, can you remember who was in this room when you brought the tea in?"

The girl nodded. "Yes," she said eagerly. "I can remember quite well, because we all talked it over in the office after we heard that Mr. Score

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— after we heard about Mr. Score. When I brought the tea in, I remember Mr. Ellison and Mr. Rigby were in Mr. Watchett's room, talking. I remember, because I was going to take their tea in there, but they seemed to be talking privately, so I didn't like to."

"That's quite right," Rigby put in. "Naturally, you can understand that we discussed all this very thoroughly among ourselves after we had heard what had happened. What Miss Howard has said is quite correct: we three were discussing a technical business point, and finally, just after the tea had been brought round, Mr. Ellison sent for Mr. Score, and he joined us as well. In the end, we all settled the point among us, and then Ellison, I, and Score came back here and drank our tea. As a matter of fact," he added, "we have already been through all that with the inspector here, when he came up last week."

Inspector Gilbert nodded in confirmation of this.

"And so," said Dodd with a sudden change of voice, "I can take it that a certain period actually elapsed during which none of the partners was in the room with the tea?"

Rigby nodded. "Undoubtedly," he agreed.

"Very good," said Dodd, and leaning forward suddenly in his seat he placed a hand firmly on Miss Howard's shoulder. The girl shrank back in astonishment, but Dodd grimly retained his grasp upon her.

"Listen now, Miss Howard," he said sternly, "I am going to ask you a very serious and important question, and you must give me the answer, no matter what the consequences. Do you understand? You must tell me the truth."

"Yes, sir," the girl managed to gasp. She was so pale that Inspector Gilbert half rose from his seat, fearing that she was about to faint, but Dodd motioned him back into his seat.

"After Mr. Score left this room," he went on slowly, "did *you* come back yourself?"

"No, sir."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you swear in a court of law that you did not?" he asked almost harshly.

The girl burst into tears. "I did not. I did not," she wailed.

Dodd relaxed his hold. He rose to his feet and stood sombrely regarding the weeping victim of his zeal. All the triumph had vanished from his face, leaving a look of puzzled annoyance. Mr. Rigby also rose and, eyeing Dodd with no great favor, clumsily attempted to pat Miss Howard's heaving shoulders. "Come, come, my girl," he said quietly, "that'll do. He's only trying to get at the truth, you know. We are all here to answer questions."

At that moment Dodd seemed to come out of his trance. Rounding suddenly on Rigby, he asked swiftly, "Anyone away on holiday?"

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Mr. Rigby was so surprised that for a moment he answered at random. "No. Yes. No. Yes, there is."

"Miss Moberly," Miss Howard sobbed through her tears, "she's due back tomorrow. She had an extra day because of the bank holiday."

"Aha! Miss Moberly," Dodd repeated. "And was she by any chance the girl who used to make the tea before you did?"

"Ye-es."

Dodd struck the table a sudden blow with his fist. "Of course," he said, "I might have guessed! *I've been a first-class jackass.* Come, Miss Howard, cheer up! The worst is yet to come! And now, if you will find out Miss Moberly's home address and type it out for me on a nice little piece of paper I dare say my friend Inspector Gilbert will have a box of chocolates for you when he comes tomorrow. Cut along, now."

When Miss Howard, with a wry smile, had taken her departure, Rigby ventured a protest. "Really, sir," he said stiffly, "I don't know what evidence you hoped to get from that girl, but I do think you might have treated her a little more gently."

"I'm sorry," said Dodd, almost flippantly. "You see, I thought she had murdered your partner, Mr. Score."

There was a moment of astounded silence. Mr. Rigby gasped, and glancing helplessly at Inspector Gilbert encountered in that gentleman's gaze a bewilderment scarcely less marked than his own.

Dodd, observing this exchange, laughed quietly.

"Well, well," he said. "Much more of this, and you will think I am going off my head." His tone changed. "And now, gentlemen," he added with a resumption of the brisk, businesslike manner usual with him. "With your permission we will meet here again tomorrow, at eleven o'clock; and I must ask you to possess your souls in patience until then. I have one more little enquiry to make in the meanwhile; but I think I may say that by tomorrow morning I shall be able to give you all the information you may desire."

"But," the inspector gasped, "do you mean ——"

"I mean," said Cedric Dodd, "that I have solved the mystery of the missing motive."

On the following morning Inspector Gilbert once again took up his post on Medworth platform in time for the 10:05 up train; but on this occasion his acquaintance failed to put in an appearance. The inspector was accordingly obliged to proceed to Bishopsgate alone, and as he once more ascended the lift to the office of Everard Ellison & Company he told himself that he should not be altogether surprised to find on arrival that Cedric Dodd, M.D., had discovered urgent business elsewhere. His fears, however, were at once set at rest by the sight of his missing colleague sitting at the table in the inner office, where all the partners were.

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"Come along, Inspector," said Dodd, in a tone as near cheerfulness as the gravity of the occasion would permit. "We are waiting for you."

Mr. Ellison rose courteously and offered the inspector a seat. "We are all somewhat at a loss," he said in his measured tones, "but we understand from your colleague here that he is in a position to tell us what we are all so anxious to hear."

"That is so," said Dodd, without giving the inspector time to commit himself to an opinion on so apparently doubtful a proposition. "In fact, I propose to do rather more than that. If you gentlemen can spare the time, I think our best method of procedure would be for me to give you a direct ocular demonstration of exactly what did take place in this room on the occasion we are now investigating."

There was a general murmur of assent.

"But first," Dodd went on, "there is one thing I should like you to know at once." He turned to Mr. Rigby. "May I trouble you to ring your bell, sir?" he asked. "Please ask Miss Moberly to come in."

A moment later the door opened again to admit a short, neat-looking young girl with bobbed hair, also clad in the green overall that seemed to be the regular uniform of the female staff. Her face, in spite of the tan of her recent holiday, was very pale, and she was obviously suffering from some embarrassment, though to Inspector Gilbert's no little surprise she greeted Dodd with a faint smile. Dodd rose at once and crossed the room to her side: "Here, gentlemen, is the girl who caused the death of Gordon Score."

For a moment there was a dead silence in the room. All eyes were turned upon the unfortunate girl, who stood her ground with a pluck that it was impossible not to admire. Then four chairs were pushed back simultaneously and a babel of voices broke out.

Cedric Dodd held up his hand.

"One moment, please," he called out loudly. "A little more patience, and you shall be fully satisfied."

The noise died down as suddenly as it had arisen.

"Now, please, Miss Moberly," he said, holding open the door, "I will call you and Miss Howard when I am ready. Gentlemen," he continued briskly, "for the purposes of this demonstration we will consider that the corner of the room over there by the fan represents the room next door. I am suggesting this, so that everyone may have the advantage of seeing for himself exactly what happened during his own particular absence from the room, while yet remaining quite clear as to the entrances and exits of the various parties concerned. You must understand that for the moment I am representing Mr. Score. Is that quite plain?"

Again there was a murmur of assent.

"Very well," Cedric Dodd continued. "The drama began with the withdrawal of you two gentlemen"

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— he indicated Mr. Ellison and Mr. Rigby — "to Mr. Watchett's room. I shall therefore be obliged if you will take your places in the corner representing that room. You, Inspector," he added with a smile, "are invisible, a mere wraith, so to speak; you can remain where you please so long as you do not get in the way. But as this demonstration is being made largely for your benefit, I will recall to you once more the last remark made by the dying man: 'Of course, it was the biscuits.'"

More bewildered than ever, the three partners moved over to the corner representing Mr. Watchett's room; and at the same time Cedric Dodd took his place at the dead man's desk. The inspector hovered vigilantly at Dodd's elbow, prepared not to miss a single gesture in the transaction he was about to witness.

"Inspector," said Dodd, who was sitting quietly at his desk as if occupied in work, "open the door and give Miss Howard her cue."

The inspector complied, and a moment later the young girl entered, very clumsily and nervously, bearing in each hand a cup of tea, with two biscuits in each saucer. Placing one cup on Mr. Ellison's desk and the other at Dodd's elbow, she withdrew.

Instantly Dodd glanced hurriedly round, rose from his seat, and carefully drawing from his pocket a small bottle wrapped in a silk handkerchief, approached Mr. Ellison's desk. Here he paused, glanced once more at the door, and then, raising his partner's cup, rapidly gulped down a portion of its contents. He then emptied into the cup the contents of the small bottle, replaced the screw cap, taking care not to handle the bottle, and laid the whole by the side of the half-full Bismag bottle already there; and in a moment more had glided to his seat and was again to all appearances hard at work.

"But ——" began Rigby.

"No interruptions, please," Dodd said. "I must beg of you to keep silence until we have finished. It was at this point," he continued, "that Score received his summons to the next room." And rising, he joined the others in their corner as if in response to it.

"Cue for Miss Moberly, please," he told the inspector.

The door opened again. Miss Moberly entered, holding in her hand a typed letter which she laid upon Mr. Ellison's desk. As she did so, she gave a well-simulated start, clicked her tongue on the roof of her mouth, muttered, "She's given him the strong tea again," and seizing Mr. Ellison's tea, bore it swiftly across the room where she exchanged it for Mr. Score's. Then, without so much as a glance at her audience, she left the room, closing the door behind her.

"That girl would make a good actress," said Dodd quietly. "You see how she came to kill Gordon Score — quite unintentionally, of course."

A few minutes later the partners, Inspector Gilbert, and Cedric Dodd

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were once more seated round the center table in the inner office.

"I managed to solve this problem," Cedric Dodd began, "by putting together various isolated facts and adding a little imagination.

"At the start I was, of course, as much in the dark as everyone else. But in a short time various significant facts emerged. The two main clues were, of course, the remarkable ejaculation of the dying man, 'It was the biscuits,' and the discovery of the poisoned bottle on Mr. Ellison's desk. From the first I was inclined to ascribe very little importance to the latter — when someone is poisoned the poison has got to come from somewhere, and a bottle can easily be carried about and placed in any desired position. But the remark, 'It was the biscuits,' came into a somewhat different category. I felt pretty well convinced that it was no mere random remark, but that on the contrary it had a direct bearing on the tragedy. Again, I was struck at once by another significant point: When questioning Mr. Score at the only interview I had with him during his life, I particularly asked for full information concerning the food and drink he had had that day. It was obviously of vital importance; and yet I soon discovered that he had deliberately omitted all reference to this little meal at the office. (I may say in passing that I was at once able to exclude from all suspicion the tea and biscuits taken on his reaching his home: a dose of arsenic, however large, could not have taken effect as rapidly as that.) These two facts alone led me to the conclusion that Mr. Score at least knew something more about the matter than he was generally supposed to know.

"Again, it seems to me that, in investigating a case of murder, it is of almost more importance to find the motive than the criminal; and there was one thing that had struck me very forcibly about this case, and that was the apparently total absence of any motive. Suicide I at once ruled out; the very fact that a comparatively valuable insurance policy had been allowed to lapse not so very long before the death rendered that theory unlikely.

"It was at this stage that I sat down to do some really deep thinking. Here was a case of a man who is taken suddenly ill — quite possibly poisoned; yet he is apparently not altogether surprised; he has obviously been wondering about it, and at last he seems to see light, and he exclaims, 'Of course! It was the biscuits'; and he deliberately fails to mention to his doctor the particular meal in which he might have suspected that poison had been administered. If it is not suicide, it is either murder — but a murder without a motive in which the murdered man knew that he was about to be murdered — or *accident*.

"If accident, whence had come the poison? Bottles containing a strong solution of arsenic are not among the usual equipment of a city merchant's office. Obviously it had been intro-

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duced by someone deliberately and with an object; and if that object was not suicide (as demonstrated), it must have been murder.

"At this point I directed my enquiries along a new line. I had already had my attention called to the fact that Gordon Score had surrendered his insurance policy — evidence of at least a temporary lack of funds — and I now recalled that he was also expecting in some months' time a further addition to his household, and therefore a further burden on his purse. Moreover, enquiries confirmed what I had already learned by hearsay, namely that the widow had not been left at all well off. Here, then, the missing motive began to appear, certainly in a somewhat inverted form; that is to say, a motive for Gordon Score *to commit murder rather than for someone else to murder him.* To test this, I asked to see the firm's partnership deed; and at once my theories were considerably strengthened by the discovery that he, of all the partners, stood to gain most by a death in the firm.

"From then onward I began to see light. If Gordon Score were the intending murderer rather than the intended victim, a number of things became plain that had before been shrouded in mystery. The presence of the empty poison bottle on Mr. Ellison's desk, for one: Score had no doubt left it there intending it to be found after the death and to suggest that the death had been a suicide. Again, the deceased's inability to give the alarm on finding that he had been poisoned also became clear, as also did his endeavours to avert attention from the true nature of his illness. You may wonder why he did not take an emetic; but of course he was by that time continually vomiting and no doubt thought that an emetic would be of no use.

"I next applied my energies to the solution of the problem of how the intended murderer came to be the victim of his own machinations; and the first and most obvious explanation of this was that somehow the cups had been changed *after the insertion of the poison.* When I heard that Score had been obliged to leave the cups unguarded, after having been left alone with them, I felt certain that this was precisely what had happened; and it was in testing this theory that I lighted upon an explanation of his extraordinary remark, 'It was the biscuits!' It was unlikely that he would have noticed the substitution of the cups, *but he would notice the substitution of the biscuits.*

"You must remember, gentlemen, that Mr. Score might be presumed to have been by this time in a state of no little excitement. And as he sits there, gentlemen, quivering in every nerve as he watches his partner gulping down what he imagines to be the fatal brew, you may well believe that he is in no state to notice details. And yet his subconscious mind, I submit, did notice one detail, though it was then unable to convey the message to his brain; his mind, I say, took

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in subconsciously the fact that *the biscuits he was eating were not those that had originally been there.* Not until hours afterwards, not until he knew that all was over and that somehow his plan had monstrously miscarried, not until then, did he realize what it was that had been worrying at the back of his mind ever since that terrible moment — the fact that there was something wrong and that that something was the biscuits. Hence his exclamation, 'It was the biscuits.'

"After that it only remained to discover how the exchange of cups had been effected, and there I went a little astray. As soon as I heard that you gentlemen were particular, as so many people are, about the kind of tea you drank, and as soon as I heard, also, that that young girl had been in trouble for serving up to the different partners the wrong kind of tea, I jumped to the conclusion that it was she who had changed the cups, completely overlooking the vital information, with which I had already been supplied, that she had only recently taken over that particular task. I thought she was withholding the admission from fear of the consequences, and I tried, rather heartlessly, to drag it out of her, and it was not until her demeanour had thoroughly convinced me of her innocence that I thought of asking whether her predecessor was away.

"The true facts proved, of course, to be simple enough. Miss Moberly, chancing to enter the room when it was empty, noticed that her colleague had once more made the mistake of giving the wrong tea to the wrong partner; whereupon, in order to save the newcomer from more trouble, she promptly and quite innocently made the exchange. She tells me that at the time she had every intention of calling Miss Howard's attention to what she had done, and warning her to be more careful in future, but shortly afterwards she was called in to Mr. Watchett's room to take his dictation, and the incident slipped her mind. On the next morning she started off for her holiday in Switzerland, from which she only returned late last night; and she had not seen an English newspaper in the interval. Fortunately, she found me at her home waiting for her, and was at once able to supply me with the information I required.

"Well, gentlemen, I think there is little more to say, except to congratulate you, Mr. Ellison, on a very fortunate escape. I should also perhaps apologize for the somewhat dramatic manner in which I chose to make my explanation; but that, I think you will admit, is no more than the artist's right. It is, so to speak, the cadenza you allow the pianist, in which he may have his own little personal fling, unfettered by the personality of the composer he is otherwise interpreting; or the interpolations you allow an author, so that he may occasionally inflict upon his readers his own views and opinions as distinct from those of the characters he is painting."

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Frederick Irving Anderson died on December 24, 1947, at the age of 70. The well-known newspaperman, Charles Honce, long a personal friend of Mr. Anderson's, went up for the funeral, leaving New York on December 26th — "the day of the big storm." Mr. Honce's train was stalled somewhere in Connecticut the entire night of the 26th; he reached Pittsfield, Mass., twelve hours late, but in time for the funeral which marked the final earthly journey of one of America's great tale-tellers. *Requiescat in pace . . .*

Like so many authors, Frederick Irving Anderson began his writing career as a newspaperman. Few remember now that he once worked on the old "New York World" — a contemporary of Irvin S. Cobb, Irving Bacheller, Theodore Dreiser, O. Henry, and many other newspaper notables. Shortly after the fabulous "World" days, Mr. Anderson became a topflight magazine contributor; for twenty years — from 1913 to 1933 — his stories appeared regularly in "The Saturday Evening Post," then under the gifted and enthusiastic editorship of George Horace Lorimer.

About ten years ago Mr. Anderson moved to a farm in East Jamaica, Vermont, where he virtually retired from writing — that is, from professional and competitive writing. He corresponded frequently with your Editor, and every one of his letters — a single paragraph or a long pouring-out-of-the-heart — was an event in our life. Mr. Anderson's opinions and reminiscences were always rich and mature, always expressed with pin-point precision, and always premeditatedly indirect yet the shortest line to the very core of truth.

In these last ten years a small band of Anderson addicts have tried to persuade some publisher to issue an omnibus of the best Anderson shorts. Aficionados like Vincent Starrett, Charles Honce, Howard Haycraft, Anthony Boucher, and James Sandoe have beaten the drums for a new Anderson collection. Your Editor actually prepared a table of contents for a book containing the greatest exploits of the Infallible Godahl, Sophie Lang, Deputy Parr, and Oliver Armiston, and submitted the selected stories together with a specially written Introduction to a publisher — only

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to be turned down with the same form-regrets handed out to the others.

Now that Anderson is dead, will it be different? Must so many writers die before their unavailable work becomes the rightful heritage of the public? Or will Frederick Irving Anderson's death send his already published books into biblivion and his uncollected stories into dusty limbo?

At this time we have only one Anderson story for which reprint rights have been granted. It is one of Anderson's earliest detective tales, published originally in 1912 — before Anderson hit his giant stride and wrote some of the finest stories produced by an American author between the Van Bibber and the night club eras. It is not, unfortunately, typical of Anderson's best work, and would not have been chosen for his definitive collection. But it has its points of interest and will serve as an hors-d'oeuvre, an appetizer, for the main courses which we will attempt to bring you later.

Goodbye, oldtimer: you are gone but you will never be forgotten; and your work will live as long as detective stories are published.

THE PURPLE FLAME

by FREDERICK IRVING ANDERSON

AT THREE o'clock in the afternoon Mr. Homer Jaffray cleared his desk for the day and announced to his secretary that he would take the 3:30 train for Waverly. The announcement was not of seeming importance, but he repeated it to himself, as he sat gazing absent-mindedly out over the tall roof-tops.

There was nothing unusual in his manner, even to the keen eyes of his secretary, who was almost his second self. To look at the dull, pallid face that hung wedge-shaped under the bulging dome of the head, to listen to the crisp, incisive voice, no one, not even his most intimate friend — if this man owned to such — would have suspected that the events of five years had been slowly pyramiding themselves into an apex for this moment. Such was the fact; yet now Jaffray, to whom the next few hours meant life or death, sat idly twirling the stem of his watch as he gave a few parting instructions to his assistant.

Before closing his desk he selected a cigar and filled his case from a box in a drawer. From another drawer, which he unlocked, he took a paper of matches that bore the advertisement of his tobacconist.

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As he bit off the end of his cigar and struck a light, he eyed his secretary sharply as though he were about to address him and were framing his words. But he said nothing. Instead he turned his attention to the match. The match burned out in his fingers, and he tossed it away without lighting his cigar. As he climbed into his great-coat, he said,

"You will see that the cost-lists of the Class 'B' ultramarines are made up and ready for me the first thing in the morning. Wire Carson in Pittsburgh to pare his estimate another five per cent if he thinks it necessary. Tell him I leave it to his judgment entirely."

At the door he turned, taking his unlighted cigar out of his mouth, and sniffed the air.

"Is it my imagination, John — or do you too detect an acrid odor in the air?"

The secretary coughed slightly.

"There is something, sir," he said. "It rather irritates my throat. It is probably from the laboratory. Good day, sir," he added hastily as his employer turned and started running for the elevator, shouting, "Down! Down!"

Ninety minutes later his train set Mr. Jaffray down at Waverly. He was the only passenger to alight; and he smiled to himself as he watched the receding tail-lights of the train. What he desired most of all in the business in hand was to leave a clear trail. And what could be more conspicuous than a solitary passenger alighting from a train at a lonely station?

He walked around the depot, a gaudy little structure of gingerbread pattern to match the mongrel architecture of this new suburb. The depot was deserted. Across the plaza stood a one-story building of fieldstone with a red-tiled roof, the office of the realty concern engaged in the exploitation of this community. Waverly was one of the so-called "restricted communities" where the party of the second part was provided with culture and gentility and Italian garden effects, along with water, gas and electricity, for a price.

It was rather a cheerless corner of the world at this time of year. A coat of snow covered the whole; the shrubbery and trees, shrouded in wrappings of straw and burlap against the icy wind that swept in from the Sound, described indefinite squares and figures-of-eight across the bleak landscape; and the only evidence of thoroughfares was the double row of gas-lamps that wound in and out among the boarded and darkened houses. Only a few lights glimmered here and there to break the gloom; for most of the residents had fled to the warmth of steam-heated flats.

"Can you tell me if Mr. Potter is at home?" he asked of the young man who greeted him as he entered the real-estate office.

"Yes, sir; he came down on the one-o'clock train."

"Can I get a conveyance to take me to his house?"

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"It is only a ten-minute walk, sir," said the young man. Through the window he pointed out a structure that stood apart from the others and showed, even in the gloom, a more pretentious exterior than its neighbors. But Jaffray feared he would find the combination of snow and ice and the uncertain going too much for him, and the young man called a carriage by telephone.

Jaffray, idling the interim, put a question or two, and the all-seeing eye of the apprentice recognizing this man as a person of affairs, began to talk volubly of the plans and prospects of the Waverly Realty Corporation, and the exceptional advantages it offered a city businessman seeking the much desired privacy and at the same time the refined surroundings, etc., etc. Jaffray smiled indulgently, nodding his head occasionally as the talker nailed down his points here and there.

"Let me send you our literature," suggested the young man as the carriage drew up to the door and Jaffray drew on his gloves.

Jaffray shrugged his shoulders indefinitely; but as the other pressed him, he took a card from his case and handed it to him, with a good-natured smile.

"Does this Mr. Porter live alone?" he asked.

"Mr. Potter," corrected the other. "Yes, sir. He is the secretary of the corporation — oh! you are Mr. Homer Jaffray," he broke in as he read the card. "I know you through a cousin of mine employed in your color-works. Would you mind, Mr. Jaffray," he asked ingenuously, "merely mentioning to Mr. Potter that I spoke to you of the Waverly proposition?"

Jaffray bent on him his lean, dry smile.

"You have my permission," he said, "to tell Mr. Potter that you interested me exceedingly."

A few minutes later he drew up at the curb, paid off the driver generously, and presented him with a cigar. He mounted the steps and rang the bell, and a maidservant admitted him to the library, a long low room whose polished floor and waxed roof-beams reflected the light of the wood-fire burning on the hearth.

He arranged himself with his back to the fire so that his face was entirely in shadow; and when Potter entered, bustling with the made-to-order assurance of his profession — for he was the resident manager — Jaffray did not stir, but watched him intently from under the cornice of his heavily shaded eyebrows.

He had not sent in his card purposely. Potter, he knew, would be accustomed to meet all manner of persons at his home without stopping on formalities, especially during these days of the active exploitation of the Waverly project, and Jaffray had counted on the natural easy inclination of a man without a family turning his home into an office. Thus he came face to face with the man he had set out so ostentatiously to meet — ostentatiously to every man in his

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path with the single exception of Potter.

Potter took in the outline of his visitor with a sharp glance, a glance keen and penetrating from long training; but the indefinite outline of a figure with only the dull background of the fire, and no other reflections than those of the falling Winter evening, suggested nothing familiar. Jaffray smiled to himself. Still he said nothing.

Potter touched a button to turn on the electric lights, mouthing an easy apology the while for the carelessness of his servant in leaving him in the dark. As he turned and faced Jaffray, he stopped abruptly and stared. He took a step backward, and one hand went involuntarily to his brow.

"Homer Jaffray!" he cried, his breath catching at his throat.

Jaffray nodded, his eyelids closing and opening with the bobbing of his head like those of a mechanical doll tipped over backward.

"Yes," he repeated, "Homer Jaffray."

Jaffray studied the face. His eyes marked the fleeting emotions written there — surprise, hatred, fear. Potter moved slowly across the room, his hand before him; he steadied himself on the arm of his chair before sitting down. He avoided the malignant eyes that followed him.

"I have been expecting this moment — for five — years!" he said haltingly, as he stared at the table.

Then he opened a drawer and took out a revolver and laid it before him. The touch of the steel seemed to infuse new life into him, for he raised his eyes to meet those of the other.

"Sit down," he said, not loud, but with a suggestion of asperity.

Jaffray took the chair opposite.

"We are men," said Potter, studying the other as though trying to divine his thoughts. "We can talk it over calmly."

Jaffray made no response, but stared at the other with eyes so hard and cold that Potter dropped his gaze and let it wander to the fire. And thus, for a full minute while the mantel clock ticked, these two men sat silent and tense.

Potter was the first to stir. He turned and took a cigarette from a tray (a movement the other followed greedily) and began rolling it absentmindedly between his palms. The act in another man might have meant nonchalance, contempt, bravado. Stupidly, as though his thoughts were miles away, he searched his pockets for a match. Jaffray leaned forward with a quick movement, handing him his paper of matches.

"Permit me," he said with his easy though elaborate courtesy.

Potter started and brought his eyes back with an effort. He looked questioningly at the other, but said nothing as he took the proffered matches and struck a light, inhaling deeply as he held it to his cigarette.

Five minutes passed, during which Jaffray, his elbows on the arms of his chair and his head sunk between his shoulders, watched the other through

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half-closed eyelids. He reached over quietly and picked up the revolver. It was an automatic weapon, potential with quick, sure death. He threw over the cap and saw that the magazine contained a full clip of cartridges. It was still greasy with vaseline, this hair-trigger engine of destruction.

He replaced it in exactly the same spot where it had lain and walking to the window, he raised the sash probably four inches, letting in a draft of cold air. Closing it again, he studied the thermometer on the wall, as the mercury slowly climbed back to normal. He picked up several pieces of paper that the draught had blown about the room, and when everything was in order again he gave his attention to Potter.

Potter's feet were drawn up under his chair, his knees wide apart; his head had fallen back and his gaze was fixed vacantly on the ceiling. Jaffray exposed one eyeball and pressed it with his finger. He felt for the pulse at the wrist and put his ear to the chest. All the while he was thinly smiling, even when the eyes stared at him. He touched the bell and stepped into the hall, drawing the door shut behind him.

"Your master is ill," he said to the startled maidservant. "Seriously ill, I am afraid. A good deal depends on your promptness. Go at once for the nearest doctor."

Her eyes and mouth opened simultaneously. Before she could exclaim, however, Jaffray seized her shoulders and turned her right-about-face.

"Hurry, there is not a moment to lose!" he said sharply.

"A very capable woman," he said to himself as she suited the action to the word and dashed out of the house, hatless and coatless.

Five minutes later, he heard steps outside, and he left off strumming his fingers on the table to open the door. A young doctor entered and Jaffray pointed to the hunched figure in the chair without a word. The doctor exclaimed in surprise, and leaned over the figure as he unbuttoned his ulster and drew off his gloves.

With one hand free he picked up Potter's right arm by the wrist, with his finger on the pulse. Between the fingers of the dead hand was the cigarette still burning, mute evidence of how shortly life had fled. With a grimace he took the cigarette from the livid finger and straightened up.

"I happen to be the coroner," said the doctor, laying down his coat. "My name is Jevons," and he looked inquiringly at Jaffray.

"I am Mr. Homer Jaffray, of 1628 William Street," said Jaffrey, producing his card.

"Ah, indeed," said the doctor-coroner. "I know you — at least, I know your firm, as I occasionally get supplies through them. This is rather an awkward situation for you, Mr. Jaffray," he added, assuming an official tone. "We officials grow rather callous to this kind of thing," he said, jerking his head over his shoulder at the chair, "but there are certain formalities that have to be gone through with. I will

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telephone the police, if you will excuse me a moment."

He went to the hall to telephone, and Jaffray heard him say:

"I think you had better come right over here, Carson, and we can clean it up in a jiffy."

The doctor stopped to question the maidservant, whose frightened face appeared at the turn of the hall; and then he came back into the room, rubbing his hands to restore their circulation.

"Will you tell me just what occurred, Mr. Jaffray?" he said. "If I am not mistaken you have a medical training. Quite good. That will simplify matters considerably."

Jaffray related tersely the circumstances. They had no especial significance, explained nothing. Potter was in the act of lighting a cigarette. He was alive one second, dead the next, that was all. Jaffray had noticed no premonitory symptoms, no spasms, no coughing. In fact, he had just come into the room. The face was rather livid. It suggested congestion, did it not? Possibly a blood clot.

"It is indeed most singular," said the doctor. "He had no heart trouble, although he smoked too much by far. I was his physician — had been in fact since he came here two years ago. He was in robust health — lived outdoors a good deal."

He was plainly puzzled, but ventured the opinion that an autopsy would clear the situation.

"You were his friend?" he asked, looking up from his examination of the dead man. "I was rather intimate with him, but I never heard him speak your name. You were his friend?"

"No," said Jaffray.

"An acquaintance, then?"

"Hardly that."

"What brought you here? I am sorry, but you will have to answer some questions."

"I understand," said Jaffray, nodding.

He hesitated as if in doubt how to frame his words.

"Well," said the doctor impatiently.

Jaffray pointed to the revolver. "Yes, you have already noticed it, I see," he said quietly. "If you wish to know how I felt toward him, you will understand when I say that if the hand of God had not intervened, still one of us would never have left this room alive!"

He turned a look of slow-burning hate at the figure in the chair. The doctor sniffed and looked uneasily about him.

"You are probably surprised at my — at what you choose to interpret as my lack of — respect, for the dead. I can save both you and myself trouble by frankness. It would be idle to show feeling, or to attempt to disguise the situation from the eyes of the police. Listen. I had sufficient and just motive to desire this man's death. And it was sufficient to make me jealous of the Divine Providence that has taken the task from me!"

"Oh, I say ——" began the doctor.

Jaffray cut in on him sharply.

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"Hear me out," he said. And then, "He took my wife from me — and thrust her aside! She killed herself three months after ——"

"I think," interrupted the doctor, rubbing his hands together nervously, "that it is rather ill-advised for you to run on like this."

He paused, embarrassed.

"On the contrary," said Jaffray, "there is no other course open. However, there is only one other thing, and you as a county official, I think, should hear it." He wetted his lips. "I lost track of this man Porter — or Potter as he called himself here — but a strange chance brought us together. He had a great many irons in the fire, as you probably know. One of his investments had to do with an anilin process for which the Etna Company holds the patent. It happens that I am the Etna Company. He did not know it; else —" he smiled grimly — "I do not believe he would have involved himself in the litigation to test the Etna's rights. I, myself, was in ignorance of his true identity until my lawyers brought information to me."

There came a sound of hurrying feet and the doctor-coroner, welcoming the interruption, hastened to the door and admitted Lieutenant Carson and a civilian companion whom he introduced as a Mr. White — a young-old man, partly bald, with a nose like Louis Fourteenth's, and eyes set very wide apart. The pair gathered the surface facts, and then, as Jaffray stood apart, the coroner related to them in a low voice the substance of what Jaffray had volunteered with such bloodless-candor. Jaffray felt them looking at him from time to time. Carson at length joined him, a queer smile on his face.

"Your attitude is rather unusual, to say the least," he said. "However, that is your own concern. There seems no doubt that this man Potter or Porter, or whoever he may have been, came to his death through purely natural causes, but an autopsy will settle that. You say that you are Mr. Jaffray, the color manufacturer. I will not detain you if you can identify yourself to my satisfaction. The fact that you take occasion to say that you would have done your utmost to commit murder, if Potter had not been so good as to shuffle off on his own accord, is nothing that concerns me. I take it that your mania does not extend beyond this man. It means nothing to me, except — if you will pardon me — to emphasize the fact that it takes all sorts of people to make up the world."

"I am afraid the coroner has put the wrong construction on my words," said Jaffray. "Believe me, I explained the situation to him solely for my own protection. If you find an investigation necessary, these facts — my mania, as you choose to call it — would be the first to come to light."

Jaffray looked at his watch.

"It is a quarter of six," he went on in a matter-of-fact voice. "My office force stays late the last three days of the month to get off the foreign mails. If you will take the trouble to call my

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secretary, you will find that I left the office for Waverly at three this afternoon. I came down on the 3:30 train, and I drove to the house in a carriage which the young man at the office was kind enough to summon for me."

"You seem to have blazed rather a clear trail," said Carson dryly. He made no attempt to conceal his instant dislike for this person. "I will telephone, as you suggest."

Jaffray followed him with his eyes as he left the room. His gaze came back to the doctor who had taken a seat at the table and was filling in his reports. There was an easy contempt in that look. The official scrutiny of these two was irritating, yet at the same time amusing to one who had come by so long a road to so satisfactory a conclusion. He dropped into a chair, his back to the room, and gave himself over to his thoughts.

He was dimly conscious of the hunched form. Something in him, a little higher than the animal, a little lower than the human, vibrated, and thrilled him with a pleasing sensation. It was appeased hunger — that was it. He had often wondered what it would be. He had never been afraid of losing control of himself. He was too sure of himself for that.

But even the beginning, which had destroyed all sense of proportion for him, seemed now dwarfed into insignificance by the finale. It had all evolved step by step, like some intricate formula that had to do with the mysticism of numbers instead of the fatalism of events.

Carson's step aroused him from his reverie. Carson was satisfied with the investigation he had made by telephone.

"I will not detain you, Mr. Jaffray," he said curtly. "You may consider yourself fortunate, however, because the average man in my situation would have clapped you behind the bars for your impertinence."

Jaffray turned to hide the flush he felt mounting to his temples. He picked up his hat and coat, saying,

"If anything develops in which I can be of service to you, you can reach me by telephone either at my home or my office."

He nodded curtly and was starting out when he was interrupted by White, the civilian onlooker.

"Just a moment, Mr. Jaffray," said White in a high, thin voice. "Just a question or two. You have half an hour for your next train."

Jaffray turned and eyed White questioningly. He had hardly noted his presence before. Now he noticed with a slight start that White had been interesting himself in the effects of the dead man, and had gathered on the table a collection of odds and ends such as one might find in any man's pockets.

"I didn't catch your name," said Jaffray.

"White."

"Of the police, I presume?"

"No. Newspaper," said White tersely.

Jaffray frowned. He had a contempt for the class.

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"Who is your tobacconist, Mr. Jaffray?" asked White imperturbably, resuming his examination of his trifles. Jaffray was in the act of buttoning his coat. His lips curled in a sneer. He produced his cigar-case, from which he selected one cigar and handed it to White.

"I have to admit," he said, "that my dealings with reporters are rather limited. However, I ought to know that cigars of course are usual. I am sorry you had to remind me. Permit me."

White took the cigar, and examined it critically.

"José Mendoza," he said, reading the name on the band. "And a very good tobacconist, I should say," he went on. "There is another formality — in dealing — with reporters. Have you a match about you?"

Then suddenly, to the amazement of the other two who stood by, watching White draw sparks from the cold-blooded Jaffray, Jaffray lost control of himself. He glared at White, pale with rage. The muscles of his face began to work convulsively. He launched bitter invectives against the press and the meddling minions whose callous sensibilities stopped them at no outrage. Carson and the doctor stared in astonishment. White waited until the spasm had passed, and said:

"A match — like this, sir — if you please."

He held up a half-burned match, which he had found in the dead man's fingers.

"You impertinent puppy!" cried Jaffray, striding toward the door. Carson blocked his progress at a sign from White. The police lieutenant was in the dark, but he was well enough acquainted with his friend White and his methods to follow his lead blindly.

"This begins to look interesting," he said; and he walked to the table and selected a cigarette for himself. "Perhaps you will oblige me with a light, Mr. Jaffray."

"Does this mean that I am under arrest?" cried Jaffray.

The change that had come over him was pitiful to behold. His cool well-poised insolence seemed demolished at one blow. His eyes lost the veil that had given his face so dull an expression; and he turned from one to the other of the three men who were now watching him intently.

Then Jaffray's eyes wavered, but he brought them back instantly. A shade of color crept into his cheeks. It was a signal for White to step forward with soft tread, holding out his hand.

"If you please," he said, his gray eyes flickering as the only indication that he appreciated the situation his simple request had conjured up.

Jaffray drew a long breath. He had himself in hand again. He produced a paper of matches and handed them to White.

"José Mendoza, eh?" said White, as he examined the advertisement stamped on each match. "A very good tobacconist."

He tore off a match and struck it and raised it to his cigar, watching its

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purple flame. He turned his eyes and encountered those of Homer Jaffray, tense and staring.

"You seem — fascinated — Mr. Jaffray," said White.

The match burned out in his fingers and he flung it away and lighted another, still eyeing Jaffray. The second burned down to his fingers and he flung this one away.

"Do you detect a peculiar odor in the room, doctor?" he asked suddenly, turning to Jevons and sniffing.

A gasping cry escaped Jaffray. Before anyone could move to block him, he had reached forward and seized the weapon that lay on the table, and thrusting the muzzle in his mouth, he quickly pulled the trigger.

"I must confess it is beyond me," said Dr. Jevons. "I detected the odor of cyanogen in the air, yes. That was unmistakable. But what had that to do with matches — and these two men who so earnestly desired each other's death?"

"This is the match," said White, "that I found in Porter's fingers. It had scarcely begun to burn, when his hand fell, extinguishing it. Do you see those tiny crystals — just beyond the burned rim? I don't know what they are. But I never saw them on a match before. Did you? Now, do you see — that blue discoloration on the match-stick? Prussian blue — I should say, eh? And the flame — it was a rich purple."

"Gad!" exclaimed the doctor, the chemist in him coming to the fore. "But how did you know?"

"I searched Porter's pockets and I couldn't find another match like that. Jaffray must have given it to him. When I asked him for a light — he knew — the jig was up. Did you see him study our faces? He wondered how much we knew. He wasn't sure — so he took a long chance — and handed me the matches."

"I still don't catch the drift," said the police official.

"I will make a guess," said White. "Jaffray was a chemist. It was easy enough to strip the paste off a bunch of matches and substitute another paste — of his own compounding. Something like cyanid of mercury in it — I should say. Heat applied to cyanid of mercury evolves cyanogen — the deadliest of gases. One good whiff — the breath, for instance, of a confirmed cigarette-smoker like Porter here, and — well, you see Porter."

"And he offered you a light!" said the policeman. "I am mighty glad he didn't select me! Now I understand why he watched you like a bird watching a snake."

"You can hold your autopsy," said White, "but I don't believe you will find anything — except possibly a trace of gas — in the lungs. That match was the thing. If it had burned up — as it should have done — Jaffray would have been on his way back to town by this time. Poor devil! I wonder if that was true — about his wife?"

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DINNER FOR TWO

by ROY VICKERS

TODAY, if you were to mention the Ennings mystery, you would be assured that "everyone knows" that Dennis Yawle murdered Charles Ennings. In this case, "everyone" happens to be right, though for the wrong reasons. The public of the day decided that he was guilty because he denounced an attractive young woman of pleasing manners and assumed respectability. And "everyone knows" that nice young women don't commit murder, whatever their walk in life, and that self-centered, solitary, aggressive little men sometimes do.

Charles Ennings was a patent agent. He lived in a flat on the third floor at Barslade Mansions, Westminster, the kind of flats that are occupied by moderately successful professional men and junior directors. A bachelor, with a promiscuous impulse freely indulged, he nevertheless managed to avoid scandalizing his neighbors.

His dead body was found in his sitting-room by the daily help at eight-thirty. Death, which had occurred upwards of ten hours previously, had been caused by a knife — thrust in the throat — an ordinary pocket knife such as could then be bought in any cutler's for a few shillings. The news, of course, did not appear before the lunchtime editions.

Dennis Yawle, the murderer, was a prematurely embittered man of thirty-two. He had taken a science degree in chemistry and had been employed by a well-known firm of soap manufacturers for the last nine years at a modest salary. His personality, rather than his science, had precluded him from promotion. The firm had given him a chance as manager of their depot in the Balkans; but he disappointed them in everything except his routine work. Incidentally, it was in the Balkans that he had learned how to use a knife for purposes other than the cutting of string.

In chemistry alone he was enterprising. He had worked out some useful little compounds, unconnected with soap, and had patented them through Ennings. His income had been substantially increased, but not to the point where he could prudently resign his job.

He believed that Ennings had tricked him over his patents, which was true. He believed that he had lost Aileen Daines because he had insufficient money — which may have been true. Hysteria was added to grievance by the further belief that Ennings himself had enjoyed the lady's favors for a brief period before discarding her for another, which was probably an exaggeration. By that particular exaggeration many a man has been flicked from hatred to murderous intent.

Daily at lunchtime he would emerge

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from the laboratory in North London with his colleague, Holldon. Holldon had his daily bet on the races, and always bought a paper from a stand outside the restaurant. He would prop it up during lunch, while Yawle generally read a book. But on January 18th, 1933, he brought no book, because he had to stage a little pantomime with Holldon's paper.

First, he must eat his lunch, which was not too easy. When the coffee arrived he delivered his line, which began with a yawn:

"Any news in that thing?"

"No. They've had to plug a murder to fill space."

Holldon was doing everything right, even to pushing the paper across the table. Yawle's stage business with the paper was easy enough.

"Good — *lord!*" He shot it out, and Holldon was sufficiently startled to attend. "I know this chap who's been murdered. I say, Holldon, this is pretty ghastly for me! I was with him last evening — I must ring the police."

"I'd keep out of it, if I were you. You have to turn up at court day after day in case they want you to give evidence."

"But they've called in Scotland Yard, which means that the local police can't produce a suspect." Yawle kept it up until the other professed himself convinced.

Five minutes later he was speaking on the telephone to Chief Inspector Karslake, giving particulars of himself.

"I was at that flat last night between seven and half-past. I don't suppose I can tell you anything you don't know but I thought I'd better give you a ring."

Karslake thanked him with some warmth, and said he would send a man to Mr. Yawle's office.

"Well-l, I have rather a crowded afternoon in front of me. I could make Scotland Yard in about twenty minutes. If you could see me then, we could get my little bit tidied up right away."

In his pocket was a crystal of cyanide to complete the tidying-up process if necessary.

To walk up to the tiger and stoke it was a desperate improvisation, necessitated by the blunders of an ill-designed murder. Indeed, it is doubtful whether his plans had ever emerged from the fantasy stage, until he struck the blow — if we except the solitary precaution of observing the porter's movements.

For three nights previously he had strolled past the flats on the opposite side of the road, noting that between seven and eight the porter was extremely busy — with three entrances and forty-five flats, most of whose tenants were arriving or departing by taxi or car. It would be child's play to slip in — and out again — without being seen.

In the fantasy, he eluded the porter, passed through an empty hall, ascended an empty staircase.

In actuality, he did elude the porter. But the hall was not empty. In

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the miniature lounge, consisting of one palm, a radiator, and three chairs, stood a girl who, as he fancied, bore some resemblance to Aileen Daines. That is, she was neither tall nor short; she was slim and dark, with regular features and liberal eyebrows. She glanced at the electric clock, sat down and began to sort her shopping parcels. Yawle looked straight into her eyes, but she took no notice of him, which, irrationally, inflamed his sense of the loss of Aileen.

The staircase, too, contributed its quota of trouble. Most people used the automatic elevator — that was why he had chosen the staircase. On the first turn, between floors, he all but crashed into an elderly lady from behind: it was such a near thing that she dropped a parcel.

He was himself startled and at a loss. The woman, small but imposing, fiftyish, glared at him with an indignation that had a quality of voraciousness — to his nerve-racked fancy, she looked as if she wanted to pounce upon him, spiderwise, and eat him.

"I'm most awfully sorry, madam! Very careless of me! I hope I didn't frighten you."

The voracious, spiderlike quality vanished from a face which was ordinary enough and even pleasing. She accepted the parcel with a graceful, old-fashioned bow and the kind of smile that used to go with the bow.

He hurried on to the first floor — up the next flight, to the second.

"I say! Do you know you really *lose* time when you do two stairs at once?"

The thin, piping treble had come from a boy of about ten.

"Do I? Pr'aps you're right. I'll take your advice."

This was a nightmare journey. The murder, still in part a fantasy, receded. Funny how that girl had reminded him of Aileen! Must have been like her, in a way. But that girl was sure of herself and happy. If only he could tell what had happened to Aileen!

The device of writing to her parents to inquire had not occurred to him. By the time he reached the third floor, Aileen's present condition was deplorable and even unmentionable — as a result of the general behavior of Charles Ennings.

When Ennings opened the door he was wearing a dinner jacket, which somehow made everything worse. He seemed younger than his fifty years: the heavy lips had become masterful: he had pulled himself in, probably with corsets. He looked successful, confident, insolent.

"I want to talk to you, Ennings."

"By all means!" Ennings was unenthusiastic, if not positively damp. "Between ourselves, I don't do business at home, but — come in, won't you?"

The hall was but a bulge in the corridor of the flat. Opposite were two doors some ten feet apart. Ennings opened one and Yawle entered the kind of near-luscious sitting-room he had expected, littered with cabinet photographs of the current inamorata — not even attractive, in Yawle's eyes.

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The telephone rang, as if to emphasize that Yawle's presence was an intrusion.

"No, it was a washout," said Ennings into the receiver. "I got home at the usual time after all, and I'm taking an evening off. Can't talk now. I have a client who's in a hurry."

Ennings cut off. He pointed to an armchair, but Yawle remained standing. Ennings sat in the other armchair.

"Gronston's," said Yawle, "have put my Cleanser in every grocer's, and every oil shop and every hardware store in the country. And it's selling."

"Of course it's selling! It's a damn fine fluid, old man. Who's saying it isn't!"

"Why do I get such measly royalties? Why is the contract signed by Lanberry's instead of by Gronston's?"

"So that's what's biting you!" Ennings had had this conversation, in one form or another, with a good many inventors. "Between ourselves, Lanberry's is a holding company, if you know what that means —"

"I know that Lanberry's *holds* one desk in one room in a back street off Holborn. And I know that the Chairman is a clerk employed by you. I've been there."

"You've been there!" snorted Ennings. "So it only remains for the bloodsucking financier to burst into tears and disgorge the loot! My good young man, you're poking your nose into things you don't understand — and you're making an infernal fool of yourself."

The main purpose, of course, was to talk about Aileen. Yawle had given no detailed thought to the matter of the royalties. Ennings and his dinner-jacket — successful, confident, insolent — was riding him.

"I shall take it up with Gronston's! There's another thing —"

"Good! I hope you'll be fool enough to do just that. In the meantime you can take yourself and your business to the devil. Your business! Your *invention!* Between ourselves, there are a good few others who've rediscovered that old formula, or copied it out of a back number —"

So, in the end, Aileen's name hadn't even been mentioned.

The skill of the Balkan bandits with their short knives — very like our pocket knives — is based on a knowledge of how to hold the knife. If you hold it properly, as Yawle did, in the palm of the hand, you leave no fingerprints on the haft. Your index finger lies along the back of the blade, slides down it as the blade impacts with an upward sweep: so there's no detectable fingerprint there, either. If your aim is accurate, as Yawle's was, there is neither bother nor noise in the killing.

Ennings remained sitting in his armchair as he had sat in life.

If all the movements were performed correctly, there should be no stains. Yawle studied himself in the mirror. There were no stains. The brainstorm, the moment of hysteria, had passed, leaving him cool, tingling with a sense of achievement and well-

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being. He felt successful, confident, insolent.

He noted that Ennings's electric clock registered seven twenty-three. He had been in the flat for less than six minutes, all told.

He shut the door of the sitting-room. He was halfway to the front door when he heard footsteps on the landing. He backed away from the front door, found himself opposite the room next to that of the sitting-room. The dining-room. He opened the door.

The footsteps died away. The light from the corridor of the flat had fallen on a white tablecloth. Using his sleeve, he switched on the room light.

The table was laid for two, and the food was on the table. Cold food. Smoked salmon; chicken; trifle in fairy glasses, with a peach on top — canned peach! So Ennings had been expecting a girl! Who might turn up at any minute!

Yawle was in the act of opening the front door, was reaching forward for the latch, when he again heard footsteps approaching. This time he did not panic. He merely stood back, so that his shadow should not fall on the glass panel.

This time the footsteps stopped outside the door. The knocker was lifted and discreetly applied. Yawle kept still. In due course, people go away when there is no response to a knock.

But this caller did not go away. There came the unmistakable sound of a latchkey being inserted.

There was no time to rush back to the dining-room. He slipped into the sitting-room, locked himself in with the dead man, turning the key with his handkerchief.

He did not hear the outer door of the flat being shut. For a moment he was ready to believe that his over-taut nerves had tricked him — that there had been no footsteps and no latchkey.

Some ten seconds later there came a light knock on the door of the sitting-room. Then the handle was turned. Yawle held his breath.

"*Char*-lie! It's *me*-e!"

A full throated, middle-contralto. Aileen had a middle contralto voice, too. But that voice was not — could not be — Aileen's voice. If it were Aileen, would she hand him over to the police?

As, by hypothesis, it was not Aileen, there was a danger amounting to certainty that the owner of the voice *would* hand him over to the police.

Seconds passed without any sound to give him a clue as to what was happening.

Then the sound of the front door being shut.

Within a minute or so he had evolved a feasible theory of his predicament. The girl has been given a latchkey, so she's one of Ennings's harem. She thinks he's cut a date with her, so she's gone off in a huff. If she's waiting for him on the landing — but she won't be! She's on latchkey terms and would curl herself up in the flat. Give her a couple of minutes to get clear.

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When the two minutes had passed he slipped out of the flat, pausing only to shut the outer door as silently as possible. The main thing was to avoid being seen or heard leaving the flat.

No footsteps. No one on the staircase. By the time he reached the second floor, his confidence returned.

That table spread with a meal for two was nothing less than a first-class alibi, provided the body were not discovered in the next ten minutes or so. No man, he could point out, would be such a fool as to murder another in a flat when he knew that a guest was momentarily expected.

He had merely to pretend that he had seen the table when he entered the flat, and he could add that Ennings had explained that he was expecting a girl friend. He need not even bother to dodge the porter.

When Yawle reached the ground floor, the porter was not there to be dodged or not dodged, being occupied with a tenant who had arrived with luggage at another entrance. Yawle strode on.

In the miniature lounge the girl who resembled Aileen Daines was adjusting her make-up. Unaware of his presence, she snapped her bag, gathered up her shopping parcels and went out of the building.

Might be Ennings's girl friend, he reflected — but without deep interest, for his ego was fully inflated. He had done what he had done — he had turned deadly peril to positive advantage. He would top it off by making use of the porter.

Luckily, he had a pen on him. He began to write a noncommittal message for Ennings, but found to his surprise that his hand was shaking. Never mind! His resourcefulness was equal to any emergency.

He found the porter at the third entrance.

"I've just left Mr. Ennings and I find that I've absent-mindedly pocketed his fountain pen." It was a standard model, unidentifiable. He gave it to the porter, with a florin. "If I were you, I wouldn't return it until the morning. The fact is, porter, he is entertaining — well, let's say a *friend!*"

By bedtime, Yawle's confidence had ebbed. Again and again he reviewed his movements, with increasing alarm. He had got clean away, but could he be dragged back? He ticked off the items.

The first person to see him enter the block had been the girl, but she obviously had not noticed him and could be ignored. Then the old lady who had looked at him like a spider. She might or might not remember him enough to give a description.

Then there was that wretched boy — almost certainly a Boy Scout obsessed with stairs and footsteps, who would love telling the police everything.

With that sterling alibi of the dinner table it would be safe to come forward, unsafe to hang back.

"There's the boy, the middle-aged woman, and the girl — all three saw you entering the building at about

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seven-ten, Mr. Yawle?" Chief Inspector Karslake was making notes as he spoke. "Can you remember what they looked like?"

"The boy I didn't notice — an ordinary boy of about ten or so. The woman, smallish, about fifty, old-fashioned, but not exactly old, round sort of face. The girl — middle twenties, about my height, dark, good looking, well-marked eyebrows, slim, quietly dressed. But I'm sure she didn't know I was there — if you're thinking of asking these people whether they saw me."

"It's only for checking up with others," Karslake assured him. "Please go on, Mr. Yawle."

"I went to the flat. Ennings opened the door. He was in a dinner jacket and told me he was expecting a friend to dinner. The way he said it, I guessed it was a girl. He showed me the dining-room — I suppose so that I shouldn't think he was stalling me — cold supper set for two. I said I would only keep him a few minutes. As soon as we got into his sitting-room the phone rang. He answered briefly and cut off."

Yawle waited while Karslake wrote. He had not anticipated that everything he said would be noted.

"And then you both sat down and discussed your business?"

"If we are to be literal, I didn't sit down — wanted to make it clear that I wasn't going to stick around."

The next bit was tricky. In the night he had worked out that the porter might have noticed when Ennings' guest went upstairs — that it must have been while he was in the flat.

"We were about halfway through our business when his girl turned up."

"And he got up to let her in?"

Confound the man with his passion for footling little details! Be careful to tell no unnecessary lies.

"She let herself in with a latchkey. I said I'd just write out a note and then —"

"Half a minute. Don't think I'm niggling, Mr. Yawle. The fact is, we use everything an honest witness tells us to check on the people who are not public spirited and may be hiding something. How did you know someone had come in with a latchkey if you were shut up in a room talking business?"

"Ennings had one ear listening for that latchkey." Yawle managed a realistic snigger. "He got up, spoke to her, said he would be with her in a few minutes."

Karslake passed him a chart of Ennings's sitting-room.

"Will you show me on that chart where you were standing when he went to speak to the girl?"

There was only one spot where one could stand to talk to a man sitting as Ennings had sat.

"On the hearth rug — here."

"Could you identify the girl, Mr. Yawle?"

"Oh, no — no! Certainly not!"

"But you must have seen her if you were standing there!" It was a statement rather than a question, and

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Yawle shrank from contradicting.

"Well — yes — but — in these circumstances, Inspector, I simply can't make a statement involving someone else unless I'm sure of what I say."

"You couldn't put it better, Mr. Yawle. All I want you to tell me now is what you saw. To begin with, you saw it was a girl and not a man. Tall or short? Fair or dark?"

"I don't think we need winkle it out that way. I can go as far as this — she was of the same physical type as the girl I noticed in the hall when I was coming in. But I cannot state that she was the same girl."

It would be better, he had decided, not to add that he had also seen the girl when he was leaving the building.

"From your description of the girl in the hall the thing a man would notice first would be those eyebrows," persisted Karslake.

"Y-yes. But —"

"Was she in evening dress?"

"No."

"Same sort of clothes as the girl in the hall, eh?" As Yawle did not deny it, "Very natural that you won't state it's the same girl, because you aren't quite positive. Very proper attitude, if I may say so. Where did Ennings park the girl in the flat?"

"I don't know. He came back to me. I wanted to make that note. I'd forgotten my pen and he lent me his. I went on talking a minute or so and absent-mindedly pocketed his pen. When I got downstairs — which I suppose was about half-past seven — I looked for the porter and asked him to return the fountain pen —" Yawle repeated the snigger " — *in the morning*."

Karslake had the air of an inspector who is not only satisfied but even grateful.

"I think that's about all, Mr. Yawle. We shall round up the boy and the woman on the stairs so that you can identify each other. The local police will probably want you for the inquest. Otherwise, I don't suppose we shall trouble you —" he pressed a bell push " — if you'll be good enough to give us your fingerprints before you go."

A junior entered with a frame and Yawle obliged.

"As far as I know," he said when the process had been completed, "I didn't leave any fingerprints in the flat. Don't think I touched anything except that fountain pen."

"But look at it from our point of view, Mr. Yawle." Karslake was urbane and even confidential. "Until we've taken your prints we can't prove that it wasn't you who had dinner with Ennings."

"Dinner with Ennings?" echoed Yawle, genuinely puzzled.

"Well, supper if you like, as it was cold stuff. There were prints other than those of the deceased on the cutlery, the plates, the glasses, some of the dishes — someone who doesn't take salt or pepper but fairly shovels the sugar on a sweet."

"D'you mean that meal was eaten?" gasped Yawle.

"You bet it was! Look here, I'm not

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supposed to show this, but you'll see it at the inquest tomorrow."

Karslake displayed photographs of the dining-room and of the table, of the débris of a meal consumed by two persons. Yawle observed particularly the fairy glasses that had held the trifle. The glasses in the photograph were opaque, with nothing showing above the rims. Before consumption the trifle had topped the rim and the canned peach had topped the trifle.

Yawle left Scotland Yard, dazed to the point of being but barely aware of his surroundings. That dinner had been untouched when he left the flat. As Ennings was dead, he could not possibly have had dinner with the girl. Therefore, somebody else had dinner with the girl — which was absurd.

Alternatively, the flat had been burgled after the girl had gone. The burglars, notwithstanding the presence of a corpse in the flat, had sat down to a meal — which was even more absurd.

Which all proved that the dinner had not been eaten when, in point of fact, it had been eaten.

That it removed all danger from himself was scarcely heeded. That photograph gave him a creeping doubt of his own sanity. He had read of eye-witnesses making wholly false statements in wholly good faith. In some amazing way he must have seen an untouched meal when he was really looking at the débris of a meal.

That meal cropped up again at the inquest. One of the jurymen, unsupported by the others, challenged Yawle's evidence in a question to the Coroner.

"How do we know that this meal was eaten after Mr. Yawle had left the flat? It might have been eaten before — I mean, it might have been lunch, or anything. I'm not suggesting it was, but as it's important evidence I think we ought to have that point cleared up."

"I think I can help there, sir," said Yawle. "When the deceased took me into his dining-room I happened to notice particularly two fairy glasses containing trifle, with a canned peach on the top. If the police can confirm that statement I think it must prove that I saw the meal laid out before it was consumed."

The police could confirm that statement. The jury returned a verdict of murder against a person unknown, with a rider indicating the young woman who had entered the flat with a latchkey at approximately seven-twenty.

The boy was found some six weeks later. He had spent a couple of nights with an uncle, one of the tenants, who suddenly remembered that fact and reported it with profuse apologies. The boy had gone back to boarding school at Brighton: the incident had utterly passed from his mind, and he failed to identify Yawle.

The elderly lady with the parcel was another unexpected stumbling block. When appeals through press and radio failed to solicit response, the Yard was ready to believe that

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she was an invention of Yawle's, prompted by a desire to tie the time of his presence at the flat at both ends. Innocent people often did that kind of thing.

The porter was interviewed again and again. His story remained sufficiently consistent. It was his busy time, dodging from one of the three entrances to another. There had never been any trouble with the police — they weren't that kind of tenant, and he was not given to observing their actions. He had not seen Mr. Yawle until he made his request concerning the fountain pen — which was close to seven-thirty.

He had certainly noticed a young woman sitting in the hall-lounge round about ten past seven. That was nothing unusual. He had only noticed her because, as he passed, she was fiddling with her bag and dropped something, but picked it up before he could do it for her. He mentioned her eyebrows and her dress, which was not the expensive kind.

The dragnet went out through the West End, though from the description of the porter and of Yawle, she was not likely to be found in any of the bars or night clubs. The search became intensive, was carried to the theatres, including the dress circles and stalls, with the result that, some six weeks after the inquest, Yawle was asked to accompany a plainclothes man and wait outside a City office about lunch time.

Out of the office came Aileen Daines.

"Hullo, Dennis!" She shook hands with frank friendliness. "I'm so glad to see you — I was going to write. You see, Leonard and I — yes, at Easter."

When she had gone, Yawle rejoined the plainclothes man.

"You saw her speak to me. She is not the one we want. I know her very well indeed."

The porter, at the same time on the next day, was not so positive. By a majority vote, as it were, of his muddled recollections, he decided that he did not think this young lady was that young lady.

"All the same, there's the bare possibility that this young lady *is* that young lady," said Karslake when he was discussing the report with his staff. "Used to be Yawle's girl, eh? There might be some tangled sex stuff there. We haven't enough to sail in with a request for her dabs. Now, if one of you boys could manage to watch her eating — when she isn't with her young man — we might get a line."

None of them did see her eating, but one of them obtained her fingerprints without her knowledge. And that dropped her out of the case — and dropped the case itself into the Department of Dead Ends.

As weeks lengthened into months, Yawle ceased to worry about his sanity in the matter of the dinner which could not possibly have been — but had been — eaten. He still carried the crystal of cyanide in a dummy petrol

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lighter, but it had become a talisman rather than a menace.

Learning that Ennings's estate had been proved at £60,000 he went to see Gronston's, who gladly gave him details of the royalties paid to Lanberry's. Yawle brought an action against the estate for balance of royalties withheld by a fraudulent device.

The action was heard in the following Spring. Detective Inspector Rason was present, not because he expected to find in the public gallery the girl who had murdered Ennings, but because it was a routine duty to keep contact with the principals in an unsolved crime.

The hearing was very brief, for there was in effect no defense. Yawle obtained judgment for some four thousand pounds and his costs. The judge remarked that the deceased had behaved as an unscrupulous scoundrel and that Hendricks, his shabby little clerk who survived him, would do well to examine his own conscience.

Rason decided to do a little examining of the clerk's conscience himself, for he had the glimmer of an idea. Over a pint of beer and a sandwich Hendricks was willing to talk.

"I knew there was going to be a rumpus when Mr. Yawle turned up at my room," said Hendricks. "I gave the guv'nor the wire, but he only laughed at me."

"When did Mr. Yawle turn up at your room?" asked Rason.

"I dunno — not the date anyhow. Must've been about a week before the guv'nor copped out."

That was the sort of thing Rason was hoping for. What business had Yawle transacted with Ennings when he knew that Ennings had been cheating him? No business. He had gone to demand restitution. And had borrowed Ennings's fountain pen to make a note of it? Rats!

Barking up the wrong tree, mused Rason. Proving that Yawle quarreled with Ennings and killed him, whereas the job is to find the girl and prove she did.

Back in the office he was reluctant to admit that he had wasted his morning. He tried hard to squeeze a girl into the discovery that Yawle had known that Ennings was swindling him. No link-up.

Start with the girl, now! She comes in with a latchkey, has her dinner, and then knifes him. Why? She must've expected him to get fresh. Can't pull the dewy innocent with that latchkey in her bag. Suppose *she* was an inventor, too? In the sitting-room she finds something, proving that Ennings has been buying her the stockings out of her own money?

The next morning he paddled back to Hendricks.

"Have you got on your books a girl, middle twenties, height about five-six, thickish eyebrows —"

"I've never seen any of 'em except Mr. Yawle. And we got no girls. Only a couple o' widows, legatees of course."

"Let's have the widows!"

Mrs. Siegman lived in Hampstead, was middle-aged and had virtually no eyebrows. Mrs. Deaker lived in Sur-

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ɔiton, which was an hour's drive out ɔf London, allowing for traffic. With ɜome difficulty Rason found a small ɜouse with a brick wall surrounding the garden on the outskirts of the ɜuburb.

The door was opened by a good-looking girl in the middle twenties, height about five-six, dark, with well-defined eyebrows.

"Are you Mrs. Deaker?"

"No. Mrs. Deaker is in town. I'm her companion and at the moment her domestic staff too. Do you want to leave a message?"

Rason presented his official card.

"Oh!" said the girl, and Rason decided to spring it on her.

"What were you doing in Barslade Mansions, Westminster, the night Charles Ennings was killed?"

"Oh!" said the girl again. "I'm not going to tell you anything until I have a lawyer."

"In that case I'm afraid you'll have to come with me to Scotland Yard," said Rason.

He was with her while she packed a suitcase and left a note for her employer, kept her within arm's reach while he telephoned the Yard. On the journey the only admission she made was that her name was Margaret Halling. On arrival at the Yard she made no objection to having her fingerprints taken.

Some three hours later Dennis Yawle turned up at Scotland Yard in response to a request by telephone. Some five minutes previously Margaret Halling's employer had arrived with a lawyer. All three, with some half a dozen others, were enduring time in a waiting-room.

Detective Inspector Rason thanked Yawle profusely, took him along a corridor behind the waiting-room.

"I want you to look through this little panel, Mr. Yawle — they can't see you — and tell me if there's any body in the room you recognize."

Yawle looked through the panel. A smile broadened.

"Yes," he said. "I shall never forget that face! That is the elderly lady whose parcel I picked up on the stairs."

"Well, I'm —" Rason was more astonished than he had been for a long time. "Excuse me, Mr. Yawle." In his agitation he pushed Yawle back to the panel, put his hand on the crown of Yawle's head, and gently twisted until Yawle could be presumed to have a view of the seat in the window.

This time there was no broad smile. Rason had the impression that he saved Yawle from subsiding to the floor.

"That's the girl with the eyebrows — the girl I saw in the hall."

"And she's the girl you saw when she let herself in with the latchkey?"

"I don't know. I said at the time I couldn't be sure the girls were the same."

"That's all right, Mr. Yawle — we never lead a witness," said Rason unblushingly. He was now in extremely high spirits, for he had had another

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glimmer. "Your statement in my file says they were of similar type. That passes the buck to us."

They went to Chief Inspector Karslake's room. The chair at the roll-top desk was placed at Rason's disposal, with Karslake on his left, for this was Rason's case, and his own room was too much of a museum for interviews.

"Well, I suppose the first thing to do," hinted Karslake, when he had heard the news, "is to have the girl in for a formal identification."

"No, it isn't, sir," said Rason, picking up Karslake's house telephone.

"Mrs. Deaker, in the waiting-room — ask her if she would like to see me. If so, bring her in."

"Mr. Yawle," said Rason. "This old girl has given Mr. Karslake a good deal of trouble, one way and another." Karslake's surprise change to profound disapproval, as Rason went on: "If she hands us anything you know to be phoney, I'd be grateful if you'd chip in and flatten her out."

Yawle assented politely. The "old woman" presented no problem. She could do nothing but confirm his statement.

Mrs. Deaker chose to brave the detective without the support of the lawyer, who was earmarked for Margaret Halling.

"I think you have seen this gentleman before, Mrs. Deaker?" Rason indicated Yawle.

"Not to my recollection," answered Mrs. Deaker. "Perhaps if you were to tell me his name —?"

"At Barslade Mansions, Westminster, on the evening of January 17th, 1933, this gentleman retrieved a parcel you had dropped on the staircase."

"Did he! Then it was very kind of him, and it is ungracious of me to forget."

"We advertised in the press and on the radio, asking you to come forward, Mrs. Deaker," said Rason severely.

"I remember those advertisements. I didn't realize you meant me!" She glared at Yawle. "Did you describe me as an *elderly* woman? That's what the advertisement said!" Before Yawle could excuse himself, she went on: "I suppose I do seem elderly to a man of your age. However, if we may consider the incident of the parcel as closed I would like to tell the police about Margaret Halling, my companion. She was there solely because my taxi brought her there. I was dining with a friend. Her train home from Waterloo was not until eighten. It was a cold night and I told her to sit in the lounge by the radiator until it was time to leave."

"Who was the friend with whom you were dining, Mrs. Deaker?"

"The man who was murdered. Mr. Ennings. But of course, you must know all about him, as you're still looking for the murderer. Now that we have mentioned the subject, you may wish me to account for my own movements, though they are of no significance, or I would have reported them.

"Mr. Ennings was a friend — a very intimate friend — before I mar-

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ried, somewhat injudiciously, the man who invented the Deaker commutator. He handled my husband's affairs. In recent years, after his death, Mr. Ennings and I — Mr. Ennings and I resumed our friendship, which was cemented by the fact that my husband had made him trustee.

"Mr. Ennings telephoned me in the morning that he might be detained at some special meeting or other. As I was doing a day's shopping, I was to come — he would have a cold meal prepared — and I was not to wait dinner for him after seven-thirty.

"As to the parcel incident, I never enter an elevator unless there is a responsible-looking man in charge. I used the staircase — which took a long time — no doubt because I am *elderly!* I duly waited until seven-thirty, and then I sat down to dinner by myself. I waited in the flat until a little after nine-thirty and then caught the ten-five home."

Rason had taken from the dossier the photographs of the débris of the meal.

"When did you see Mr. Ennings?"

"Obviously, I didn't see him at all."

"How did you obtain entry to the flat?"

"I lifted the knocker, as there was a light in the hall." Her words were labored as she went on: "I thought I had sufficiently emphasized the fact of our friendship. I have a latchkey. Here it is." She took it from her bag and gave it to Rason. "I went to the sitting-room, but the door was locked. I knocked, then called his name. Then I looked about the flat, shut the front door and went into the dining-room to wait for him. Once, I thought I heard the front door being closed, but it was a false alarm, so I sat down and had my dinner."

Yawle had reached forward and snatched from Rason's desk the photograph of the débris of the meal.

"I don't think so, Mrs. Deaker!" cried Yawle. "Look at this photograph. Two persons ate that dinner!"

They were glaring at each other.

"Half a minute, Mr. Yawle!" interposed Rason. "I thought Mr. Karslake had told you everything! Did he forget to tell you that there was *only one set of fingerprints on those dishes?*"

"Then they must be mine!" sighed Mrs. Deaker. "I had hoped to escape this public humiliation. The degrading truth is that I can eat — and I often do — as much as two men! By nine, I concluded that Mr. Ennings must have had his dinner. So I — I — I really *did* —"

Rason left Mrs. Deaker floundering in a whirlpool of social shame.

"Well, Yawle, let's get back to that young girl you saw in the flat, whom you can't *quite* identify with the young girl you saw in the hall. Eyebrows an' all, too! Or would you rather ask Mrs. Deaker some questions about that sitting-room door *that was locked on the inside?* At about twenty past seven, as near as makes no matter to you, Yawle!"

But Yawle possessed a talisman in a dummy petrol lighter that warded off all further assaults on his dignity.

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Alfredo Segre won First Prize in EQMM's Third Annual Contest. His prize-winning story, "Justice Has No Number," was considered the finest first-prize winner yet selected by EQMM's Board of Judges. But even before Mr. Segre submitted his prize story, he had sent your Editor another tale, and we had purchased it. This tale is altogether different from "Justice Has No Number" — different in type, in mood, in background, and in calculated effect. "The Roses in Black Velvet" is as strange as its title. In its own peculiar way it qualifies for our Department of "Bedtime Stories" — for is not bedtime the time for night-thoughts? Thoughts of love, mystery, and beauty? Thoughts of hate, revelation, and the ugly undercurrents of life? Thoughts of death? Of horror?

In full bloom the rosebush had such deep, dark red roses. But a rosebush without flowers, without leaves, might look at bedtime, in a dim light, like a thin, black skeleton — a skeleton of the dead past.

THE ROSES IN BLACK VELVET

by ALFREDO SEGRE

TODAY the doctor told me in a tone of finality that if I wish to live, I must seek a different climate. I have no intention of leaving the moors, and so I think that if things happen as the doctor predicts, I had better explain to my friends, while there is still time, the cause of my long seclusion.

I had come to Q. for a quiet vacation. In Q. there were no health springs, no pine forests, and no summer theaters. There wasn't even a railroad station. I had taken a small house at the top of a hill. The view from there was unpretentious — stone-hedged fields as far as one could see. Directly below my cottage, at the foot of a gentle slope covered with gorse and heather, was a small villa surrounded by a garden.

In this garden I often saw a middle-aged gentleman in a reclining chair. The woman who kept house for me informed me that he was Mr. Rogers, a flower enthusiast. I don't think I would ever have bothered to call on him if I hadn't been lonelier than I cared to admit.

My first meeting with him was rather awkward. I had thought up a fairly decent excuse: I was going to raise some ice plants in my room. His answer cut me short.

"I know nothing at all about fleshy plants . . . fleshy plants indeed," muttered Mr. Rogers disgustedly.

But I wasn't to be discouraged. I began to talk of exotic flowers — But the more I spoke, the more uncomfortable I felt. I was a rude intruder with a flimsy excuse.

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"Look," Mr. Rogers suddenly interrupted me; "look at those roses."

I noticed then that directly in front of his chair was a large rosebush. The flowers were a deep vermilion, of a shade which reminded me of the juice of dark red grapes. I had a fleeting impression that the petals were drenched with it and in fact I couldn't help moistening my lips.

"They are wonderful!" I said.

"No," said Mr. Rogers, "they're not wonderful — they are unique. You understand? — unique!"

And having uttered this sentence, Mr. Rogers fell silent. I rose to go, saying that I lived in the small house at the top of the hill and that I hoped to join him again in his garden.

I can't say that during my subsequent visits Mr. Rogers treated me with any great show of cordiality, but my restraint, and my respect for his long silences, served to render my presence tolerable to him. I also observed that my host, sometimes after weeks had elapsed, would ask me questions which were somehow connected, as if he were patiently piecing together a puzzle. Thus, if I said to him one day that I had few friends, two weeks later I would surprise myself in the act of defining exactly which friends I preferred. And this slow, suspicious probing had made me extremely evasive. Only when we sat near the rosebush did we feel completely at ease together.

Somehow, I was not at all convinced that Mr. Rogers was a flower enthusiast. Even people with specific manias follow a certain logical train of thought and action. But Mr. Rogers puzzled me. One morning I saw him place a large mirror before the rosebush and proceed to prune it with a pair of manicuring scissors. On another occasion I caught him dusting the branches with a chamois cloth. And one evening I saw him seated in his garden, in his usual place, wearing a full-dress suit, holding an opera hat on his knees.

But the strangest incident of all occurred on an autumn afternoon. Mr. Rogers did not hear my footsteps on the gravel path, nor did he answer my greeting. A chill wind had risen and the whole garden was whispering wildly. I stopped a few paces behind him and held my breath. The rosebush was covered with something black — a vivid, living black which shuddered at every gust of wind. Mr. Rogers was gesticulating; he kept disappearing among the branches and I could hear him muttering incoherently. Finally I understood that he was trying to cover the rosebush with what appeared to be a length of velvet, but I was again completely disconcerted when I saw that it was a dress — a long black velvet dress — and that Mr. Rogers was patiently trying to slip the sleeves on to the branches against the whipping wind, as though the rosebush were a mannikin. What was he trying to do, I wondered, set up a scarecrow? Or did

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he want to protect the late-blooming flowers from the chill of autumn? At this moment Mr. Rogers stepped back from the rosebush and bowed his head. The branches filled the skirt of the velvet dress and stretched the sleeves taut in a wild gesture of invocation. A spray of leaves sprang from the neck and in their very midst was a prodigious rose. For a split second I felt a sharp stab of pain. I coughed. Mr. Rogers whirled around.

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing," I stammered, "I . . . I just wanted to see you. . . ."

Mr. Rogers gripped my arm and gave me an intense and desperate look. And in a voice which even now seems to come back to me from beyond the low hedge bordering the cemetery, he asked:

"Do you know what it is to love?"

I stepped back slowly towards the gate. The velvet dress whipped furiously in the wind. Mr. Rogers, I thought, was mad, utterly mad, and I would certainly never come here again.

The following week the milkman knocked at my door and left me a note. He had found it rolled up in an empty bottle, at the foot of the stone steps of the garden path which led to Mr. Rogers' house. I opened it.

Dear David,

Please come to see me. The door will be unlocked. My room is on the ground floor, at the far end. Come as soon as you can. Thank you.

. . .

I was so alarmed by these words that I left the house as I was, in robe and slippers. I hurried down the winding path, the gorse tearing at my clothes, and suddenly I felt a kind of relief and exhilaration at being forced to return to the villa. As I was crossing the hall, I heard Mr. Rogers calling to me. I caught only a glimpse of the staircase which led to the second floor. The wooden steps were laden with a thick coat of dust so that in the half-light they seemed made of stone.

Mr. Rogers was doubled up in a small bed; I had not realized he was so thin.

"Aren't you feeling well?" I asked. "Please sit down."

For a moment I felt myself being scrutinized attentively.

"Listen carefully, David," he said in a low voice. "I may have to speak for a long time. . . . I beg you not to interrupt me, because it would be very difficult for me to continue — I might not have the strength. And when I've finished, promise me you'll think a while, then give me your answer."

I nodded. Near the window, I noticed, was a large vase. It was full of dried blossoms.

"Twenty-five years ago," he began, "Milton Briggs came to live in this house. The house was part of a large estate I was handling as a solicitor. It was I, therefore, who sold Milton Briggs this house." He spoke rapidly,

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ıervously, as if he were afraid of hanging his mind. "You see," he ontinued, "it's difficult to tell the vhole story, so difficult to find the ɔeginning. And yet for years I have epeated it to myself, till every detail ıas become engraved in my memory. Tou see, it's a story which flows on moothly, like a river. And then it ɔauses and disappears . . . I'll try o make myself clear . . . Yes, this s the beginning. When Milton Briggs ɔought this villa and the grounds, he vas very wealthy, and something of a nob. Not very talkative. His interests eemed to be centered on this house, his garden. For six months he did ıothing but plan color schemes and ;arden landscapes. When the folds of he last drape were rearranged to his atisfaction and the ivy had grown hick over the front wall, Milton 3riggs announced quite suddenly that ıe was ready to look for a wife.

"I remember my first thought was hat he would be gone a long time, hat a man who had spent three veeks deciding whether the walls of he bath were to be black marble or ɔlue terracotta tile was not likely to all in love at first sight. And I even magined the kind of girl she would ɔe. She would be shy and slight. . . . You see, I could imagine her quite :learly, because Milton Briggs had pent fifteen years in the mining dis-:ricts of West Africa. And he had told ne once that dreaming had become a ıabit with him. He used to dream very night, and even during the day, n the rainy season. So I imagined his wife would be shy and frail, because these are the women men dream about — men who spend lonely lives in faraway places.

"Ten days later, Briggs was back. With a wife. I saw her the first time over there. . . ." Mr. Rogers raised his arm and pointed to the window. "I won't try to describe her, I'll only tell you that from that very moment I fell in love with her. Irrevocably. With the wife of Milton Briggs. . . .

"I tried desperately to keep away from this house, but even the thought of a day gone by without having seen Hayde was torture. Milton Briggs did not love her. His was a kind of mute, anxious adoration. Whenever he looked at her, I always had the feeling he was saying to himself, 'Steady, Milton . . . Hayde's not real, you know . . . Hayde is a dream, and she'll vanish like the memory of dreams. . . .'"

Mr. Rogers' hands were very white. On a chair beside the bed was his dress suit. I realized suddenly that fixed in my mind was an image of Mr. Rogers, dead, dressed for a formal evening.

He continued in a low voice. "I can't tell you everything, not because I hesitate to confess. . . ." For a moment his voice was strong and vibrant. "My love was something pure — like a jet of flame . . . and yet this pure love of mine drove me to a hundred petty lies, a thousand miserable deceptions. . . . Hayde used to laugh, she would tap me lightly on the shoulder. . . . Once I

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got near her, really near her. Milton Briggs had asked me to take her to a concert. . . .

"But perhaps you want to know who she was, this Hayde, as I had so often asked myself. I never knew. You see, it's an easy thing to ask of any woman: 'What books have you read? . . . did you knit this yourself? . . . do you like to ride?' But not Hayde. Hayde had no story. . . . Hayde was — how shall I describe her? — Hayde was the dawn. And would you ask of the dawn: 'Tell me where you are born, why yesterday you were so gray, and how it is you are so splendid today?' No, you couldn't ask anything of Hayde. Hayde was born anew every day, can you understand? . . . It's not even a question of understanding, but rather of feeling. Yes, you must feel it. Do you?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I think I do."

"Well, then, see her, as she was that night, dressed in a black velvet dress. Milton was suffering from one of his periodic attacks of malaria, but he insisted on taking us to the carriage. When the horses started, he was about to say something, but Hayde touched his lips with her fingers and Milton bowed his head and just barely brushed her cheek with the back of his hand. I began to have all sorts of ugly thoughts — remorse, a kind of insane jealousy — and I alternated between the most bitter reflections and almost intolerable visions. And my suffering turned to agony the moment we were seated in the train which took us to the city. I don't know, it seemed as if Hayde's presence brought out all the latent bestiality in others. . . . I'll never forget the hand of a young man creeping stealthily along the arm-rest of the seat toward Hayde's hand. . . . Isn't it horrible to observe others while they carry out your own gestures, the ones you think are sublime? . . . Oh, excuse me, I must not get lost in details. . . .

"In the city I took Hayde's arm. I wasn't aware of the people in the streets; the store windows were mere bright flashes as we passed. I felt that every drop of my blood was in my hand, the hand which held Hayde's arm. I didn't think, I only felt a queer light buzzing in my head. An exclamation of delight from Hayde roused me. She was pointing at a window. In the window was a rose, a single dark red rose, in a crystal vase. Nothing else. Just that rose. And all of a sudden I realized that Hayde and the rose were one. . . . Try to understand: I sensed that this was actually so, and it was no poetic sentimentality. Hayde and the rose in that window were really the same thing because Hayde could be compared to nothing else in the world, nothing else but its warm splendor and its almost frightening sense of elusiveness.

"I bought the rose and pinned it to the black velvet dress. I didn't hear the concert. I held her hand, lightly. When there was a burst of applause at the end, I lifted my head and

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noticed that Hayde was looking upward, toward the boxes. There was a young man there. . . ."

Mr. Rogers closed his eyes. I saw clearly the gilded boxes, a plump angel with a trumpet, a pair of opera glasses on the red velvet.

"It is useless to talk about him," Mr. Rogers continued, "It would be foolish for me to make it personal — after all, I don't even remember his face. You see, every man near Hayde was the same ugly enemy . . . except Milton, of course. But never mind all this. . . . As soon as the concert was over I hastened to remind Hayde that her husband was at that very moment shivering with fever. I hoped in this manner to isolate her, to remind her of duty, of ties — I who a few moments before had almost forgotten it myself. . . . I even insisted on a description of the violence of malarial attacks. But Hayde looked at me calmly and answered, accompanying the words with a careless gesture of her fan: 'They are like storms; Milton expects them.'

"There was to be a ball after the concert. I argued desperately, swore I was very tired, contradicted myself in a dozen ways, but we went — because Hayde wanted to go. And things happened as I had foreseen. The young man walked straight towards Hayde, spoke to her in a whisper and put his arm around her. Hayde asked me to hold the rose, so that it would not spoil. I held it while she danced. I held it in the train, in the carriage, all the way home. We found Milton at the gate. It was nearly dawn. Hayde asked for her rose and Milton touched it with his lips. . . ."

In the long silence which followed I had to make a great effort in order to keep my promise not to speak till the end of the story.

"The next day," Mr. Rogers' voice was bitter, "the next day Milton came to see me at my office in the city. I had spent the night torturing myself and finally I had decided to tell Milton that Hayde would bear him fine sons and that there was no time to lose if he wished to grow with them. . . . All this may seem vulgar to you — and it may well be — but remember, I wanted to destroy my own love and also, I admit, that of another. . . . Milton thanked me again for having taken his wife to the concert, and as I was about to speak he announced to me with a smile that Hayde had decided to go to the city to take singing lessons. How can I describe my feelings? Milton even asked me where I had bought the rose, and I was amazed at how alike our thoughts were.

"In the beginning Hayde went to the city once a week. I couldn't help dropping in to see Milton on that day. We would sit in the garden, avoiding each other's glances, and I am sure we had the same thoughts: mine precise and bitter, his indefinite and perplexing. Then Hayde decided to increase the number of her lessons. At this point I lost all sense of dignity, and that was one of the happiest days

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of my life. I followed her. Hayde went to an old Frenchman for her lessons. His name was Meunier.

"When I gave Milton the news, I told it casually, so as not to raise the slightest doubt in his mind. Milton did not want to know — he had the strength not to want to know. So I took a walk with him and told him I had visited friends in the city and that one of them was a pupil of Professor Meunier, a voice teacher. 'And do you know, Milton,' I said, 'my friend told me Meunier had a prize pupil whose name is Hayde.'

"Knowing Milton, I did not expect that he would openly express his relief, but I certainly did not expect that he would answer brusquely: 'Is that all? I knew that long ago, Mr. Rogers!'

"I was tormented with remorse. Remorse at having suspected Hayde, at having pitied Milton, at having stooped to spying. To clear my conscience I decided to tell Hayde everything. I loved her too much. I went to the city the day she had a lesson. And on my way to the studio, I ran into Milton. I asked him if he had come with Hayde or whether he was waiting for her to take her back to Aiken. He laughed, and his eyes were boyish. He had a surprise, a surprise for Hayde, and I had to swear to keep it secret. . . .

"Together, we went to the station depot. There was a large bulky package on the counter; I couldn't imagine what it was. Milton tore open the thick paper; he had searched everywhere, he had written to a dozen nurseries, and finally he had been able to obtain this rosebush. The rosebush which had such deep, dark red roses. My roses. Hayde's roses.

"He left, telling me he was returning home and that during the night while Hayde was asleep, he would plant the rosebush in a corner of the garden and that as soon as the buds opened, he would take Hayde by the hand and show it to her in all its glory.

"Alone, I hurried on. I knew the lesson would be over at four in the afternoon. Exactly at four, Milton turned the corner. He stopped before the door of the house and waited, impatiently twirling his hat in his hands. Milton's presence, I reflected, was a reminder that I had no right to speak to Hayde of my love. Yet, and this may surprise you, the thought that Milton might have had suspicion on my account, had remained in the city because of me, irritated me immensely. I decided to go away. I would see Hayde another time. But after a few steps I was looking back again, furtively. Milton was still there. Ten minutes passed. A half hour. Hayde did not appear. All of a sudden Milton walked towards the door, but then he stopped, turned on his heel resolutely, and walked to one side. Milton had the strength not to want to know, I told you. . . .

"At half-past five I saw Milton look at his watch and walk away slowly. Head bent, he turned the corner. But if Milton didn't want to

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know, I did. Old Professor Meunier informed me that it was almost a month since he had last seen Hayde.

"I thanked Professor Meunier and left. At the station I waited. Hayde had to come home some time and the last train was at eight. At five of eight I saw Milton appear at the far end of the platform. I walked over to him and asked him to join me. We sat down in the train and at the same moment both of us looked out of the window, and both of us explained to one another that we had forgotten to buy the evening paper. When it was almost eight, I . . . yes, I pushed Milton back from the window, so that he would not see. But perhaps it was already too late, or perhaps Milton understood. I don't know — I told you there was such a deep kinship between us. I pushed him back; Hayde had come, she was on the platform with the young man I had seen at the concert. He had his arm around her possessively, and she was aware of nothing — only of him. . . ."

Mr. Rogers shifted painfully in his bed.

"Just as we pulled into the station at Aiken, I said to Milton, who had been silent throughout the whole trip, 'Listen, Milton, suppose Hayde is on the train with us, in another compartment. Don't you think it would be wise to get off quickly and pretend we've come to meet her?"

"He just shrugged his shoulders.

"The train stopped. We got off hurriedly and when I saw Hayde I ran to meet her and pointed to Milton. Then I told her we had planned to surprise her. Her eyes were very bright. We got into a carriage, the three of us, silently. . . .

"That night I tried to read. I couldn't. At about two in the morning I started down the hill to Milton's house. As I approached the garden gate, I heard faint sounds; then they became heavy, regular blows. The house was in darkness. I skirted the hedge till the sounds became distinct, and suddenly I saw Milton — not his face, only his broad back outlined in the semi-darkness by his white shirt. Never in my whole life have I felt so miserable: Milton was planting the rosebush."

Mr. Rogers passed his hand over his throat and closed his eyes.

"Milton was planting the rosebush — he had forgiven. . . .

"When I returned home, I began a letter to him but I did not finish it because of a persistent doubt: perhaps Milton had not seen, did not know; perhaps he only suspected, and in that case I could still speak to Hayde, not of my own love — I hadn't the right — but of Milton's love.

"It was ten o'clock in the morning when I opened the gate of the villa. I met Milton in the garden. He was smoothing the earth around the rosebush with his hands. Milton remained kneeling and spoke to me without raising his head, 'I was waiting for you, Rogers,' he said; 'I wanted to tell you that I'm leaving, and to say goodbye. . . . I've finished what I

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had to do. . . . This rosebush, it's yours now. . . . Soon there will be blossoms . . . and I know that you will care for them; and for this house too. . . . You will find the black velvet dress on her armchair. . . .'

"He was silent for a long while. His face was dull with fatigue.

"Milton left the next night. Twenty-two years have passed and Milton Briggs hasn't returned. The roses bloom every year. Every day during the summer there is a new one on the branches, because Hayde is reborn every day. And I have been faithful to her, like Milton, and when I come to the garden to be with her, to take her to concerts, she wears her velvet dress, with the rose on her breast. . . . And now tell me: If I were to die, would you accept this house and this garden?"

I looked fixedly at Mr. Rogers' wasted face. "Yes," I answered . . .

Mr. Rogers is buried here, half a mile from my house, which was his house, and Milton's.

People say that I am a flower enthusiast also. The stairs which lead to the second floor are still covered with dust, and the black velvet dress is torn in several places from the thorns of the rosebush.

The doctor warns me to leave this climate, but I have no intention of moving. I just wanted to explain to my friends, while there is still time, why I have never returned from this small village on the moors. Perhaps some of them will remember that many, many years ago I was madly in love with a woman — a woman who never told me her name, who never let me know anything of herself, except her frightening beauty.

The last time I saw her was the night I took her to the station to catch an eight o'clock train to Aiken.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, published monthly at Concord, N. H., for October 1, 1948

State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Joseph W. Ferman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: *Publisher*, Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; *Editor*, Ellery Queen, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; *Managing Editor*, Robert P. Mills, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; *Business Manager*, Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: The American Mercury, Inc., 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

J. W. Ferman, *Business Manager*.

Sworn to and subscribed before me, this 21st day of September, 1948.

[Seal] Ethel M. Shields, *Notary Public*
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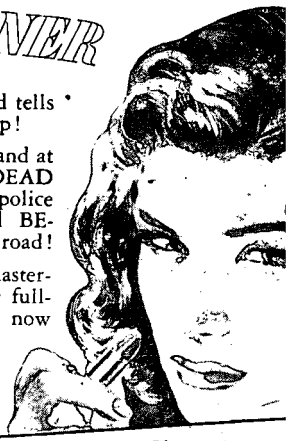

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